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# Lengkhawm Zai

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A Singing Tradition of Mizo Christianity in  
Northeast India

Joanna Heath  
(2012)

A thesis presented in complete fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts  
by Research in Musicology at Durham University.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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Joanna "Lalzovi" Heath  
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## Abbreviations and Glossary

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This is by no means an exhaustive list, and includes only the terms which are used in this thesis. The reader is directed to the dictionaries of Lorrain (1940, available online) or Ropianga (2008) for further vocabulary.

Following Mizo convention, the letter ‘ṭ’ is treated as a separate letter. It represents a central alveolar flap whose pronunciation approximates to the opening consonant of words such as ‘try’ and ‘drink’.

### *Abbreviations*

AICS – Academy of Integrated Christian Studies, Aizawl (Baptist)  
 ARCE – Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology, HUDA City, Delhi  
 ATC – Aizawl Theological College (Presbyterian)  
 BCM – Baptist Church of Mizoram  
 ETC – Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam  
 KHB – Kristian Hla Bu (Christian Song Book)  
 MGCC – Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee  
 MNF – Mizo National Front  
 MZU – Mizoram University, Aizawl  
 PFHB – Pathian Fakna Hla Bu (Songs of Praise to God, staff notation edition of KHB)  
 ṬKP – Ṭhalai Kristian Pawl (Baptist Youth Fellowship)  
 YMA – Young Mizo Association

### *Mizo Musical Terms*

Hla - Song  
 Hla Bu – Song Book  
 Hlahriltu – Song proclaimer  
 Hla pui – Spontaneous spiritual song used to revive people from ṭul  
 Khuang – Drum  
 Khuang pahni – lit. Two drums, referring to the paired large and small drums  
 Khuangpui – Large drum  
 Khuangte – Small drum  
 Kuai – Hooked sound, ‘bending’ down of a pitch  
 Lam - Dance  
 Lamtual – Dancing area  
 Lengkhawm – lit. Gathering together; describing the post-revival traditional worship  
 Lengkhawm zai – The style of singing employed during lengkhawm  
 Lengzem zai - Love songs (secular songs)  
 Phuahtu - Composer  
 Thluk – Tune or Flow  
 Thunawn – Chorus or refrain  
 Tlawng-Dang – The sound of the khuang beating  
 Ṭhing-Dup – The sound of the guitar strumming  
 Ṭingtang – Guitar, formerly referred to a one-string bowed lyre  
 Zai – Sing, singing  
 Zaikhawm – lit. Singing together; a specific event dedicated to lengkhawm worship

### ***Mizo Religious and Traditional Terms***

Aw – Yes (poetic: yea)  
 Beirual – The Mizo ethic of united effort  
 Chapchar Kut – Annual festival in March  
 Fak – Praise  
 Harhna – Revival, ecstasy  
 Hlimmai – Joy  
 Hnatlang – The Mizo ethic of equality of being, also voluntary social work as a community  
 Inkhawm – Worship, fellowship  
 Isua – Jesus  
 Khawhar Lenpui – Community vigil or wake held in the deceased's home  
 Khuanu – God (female)  
 Khurbing – Revivalist intimacy between two or three individuals  
 Kohhran – Church  
 Lalpa – Lord, Lord God, Father God  
 Lasi – A female jungle spirit  
 Lunglen – Invoked sentimentality  
 Lungleng – Expressed sentimentality  
 Mihlim – 'Ecstatic person', a person particularly susceptible to *ṭul*  
 Misual – Sinner  
 Mitthi Khua – Village of the dead  
 Mumang – A vision  
 Pathian – God (male)  
 Pialral – Heaven (animist)  
 Puan – Woven full-length skirt worn by women, more generally any woven cloth  
 Thianghlim – Holy  
 Thlarau – Spirit, soul, so *Thlarau Thianghlim* means Holy Spirit  
 Thlarau mi – Spiritual person  
 Tisa mi – Person of the flesh (archaic revivalist term)  
 Tlawmngaihna – The Mizo ethic of selflessness  
 Ṭawnghriatloh – Spiritual language, usually sung  
 Ṭul – Involuntary physical behaviour when under spiritual compulsion  
 Van – Heaven (Christian), the heavens  
 Zo Nun Mawi – lit. Beautiful Mizo life  
 Zu – Rice-beer

### ***A Note on Mizo Names***

Mizo names are constructed freely, based on combinations of clan and sub-clan names, a Mizo personal name, and often an English name. The order of these varies, and some elements might be reduced to initials.

Many personal names begin with 'Lal'. *Lal* means 'lord' and once indicated chieftainship, but many early Christian converts chose to add *Lal* to their names to signify their belonging to the 'Lord' God.

Personal names ending in '-a' are masculine. Names ending in '-i' are feminine.



# 1. Introduction

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In modern times there is little to distinguish the Christian worship pattern of Mizo society from the pattern of daily life. One cannot fail to notice the church routine of all the major denominations being played out in public. Early on Sunday morning, between 5 and 6 a.m., bells are heard calling some of the more devout worshippers to a morning prayer meeting. Later on, the streets of both town and village are filled with what is almost the entire population in their Sunday finery making their way to the main church service. For once in the week, the roads are blocked by pedestrians instead of vehicles, as everyone has been assigned membership to a church in their own locality<sup>1</sup>. A lady passes on the back of a motorbike and you recognise from her *puan*<sup>2</sup> that she belongs to the prestigious district choir. They must have been invited to sing at a special service today. Sunday school for all ages in the afternoon, followed by fellowship meetings and an evening service, will keep many people at church for the majority of the day.

Everyone in a church belongs to a fellowship of members of the same age group. This group will meet to worship one evening every week. The church choir, comprising about twenty of the young adults, practises twice weekly. The music from these midweek church events can be heard clearly from most of the homes in the locality. Mizoram would be quite a different place without the daily sound of the bells, the choirs, the cacophony of neighbouring churches worshipping on a Sunday and the bustling of the crowds of church-goers. Even in the home, the television often lingers on a local 24/7 gospel music channel or the broadcasting of yet another church service. Only a European football game or the next instalment of a Korean soap opera dubbed into Mizo is likely to bring about a change of channel.

This thesis steps into the world of Christian music-making in Mizoram in an attempt to comprehend the deep relationships between Mizo worship, Mizo music and Mizo society. We will specifically examine the nature of tradition within modernity in this Christian context, studied from the perspective of a style of hymn-singing called *lengkhawm zai*.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Locality' is a technical term applied by the Presbyterian and Baptist denominations. The churches are divided into administrative groups called 'districts', which are divided into 'pastorates' of a few churches, each of which belongs to one 'locality'.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional woven cloth, worn as a wrap-around full-length skirt by all adult women on Sundays and special events. Each choir has a uniform design.



Figure 1: Tea after the Sunday morning service, Central Baptist Church, Aizawl. (Photo: Author)

The Mizo hymn repertoire includes translations of western hymns as well as original compositions, and many of these are often sung with a modified tune and singing style that emerged during a period of spiritual revivals between 1906 and 1930. This singing style and the songs that have been composed specifically for it have come to be known as *lengkhawm zai*, and represent a Christian but indigenous musical tradition, with associated dance, gestural and instrumental conventions. The context in which this singing takes place is *lengkhawm*. Defined by Khiantge<sup>3</sup> (2006: 121) as the ‘traditional way of singing with two drums’, *lengkhawm* is the genre which comprises the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Principal, Serampore College, originally from Mizoram.

1. Two drums guiding the tempo and beat (see Chapter 5)
2. Congregational singing led by a *hlahriltu* (song-proclaimer, see Chapter 5)
3. A song whose tune is of the appropriate style: *lengkhawm zai* (see Chapter 3)
4. Opportunity and space (*lamtual*) to dance (see Chapter 5)

It typically takes place in two contexts: at a church service, and at a dedicated event for community singing called *zaikhawm*, which mainly happens at Christmas. Whereas *lengkhawm* in general is often traced to the times of social singing among the village men after drinking *zu* (rice-beer), the *zaikhawm* is sometimes associated with the former celebrations of the Chapchar Kut festival, which often took place amongst community groups in family homes (Kipgen 1997: 280).

Can this relatively modern practice be described as traditional singing? In what way has it been shaped by the Christianity of the missionaries and subsequent influences from contact with other musical cultures? In what way does it reflect a continuation of the musical tradition that existed before the missionaries arrived in 1894?

These questions form the central theme of this thesis. However, it is important to clarify that when discussing ‘tradition’ we will be seeking to place *lengkhawm* within the discursive frameworks of traditional society and traditional practices as articulated by Mizo scholars themselves. An understanding of the Mizo perspective of what tradition and traditional worship means will become particularly relevant in Chapter 4 as we identify the way in which *lengkhawm* embodies certain aspects of Mizo traditional values despite these being of relatively recent significance.

This issue relates to our use of the terms ‘modern’ and ‘modernity’. In describing *lengkhawm* as a modern tradition, we not only recognise that it only came into existence in the 1930’s, but that it belongs to and originated in the most modern era for the Mizo people so far: the Christian era. However, this era has itself seen much change and development due to Mizoram’s political relationship with India and the rapid introduction of forms of mass media and communication. These are signifiers of the ‘modernity’ to which *lengkhawm* has had to respond, a subject primarily addressed in Chapter 5.

## 1.1 Ethnography

In order to contextualise the arguments of this thesis which relate to Mizo tradition and traditional society, it is essential to establish as far as possible an ethnographic account of the historical and social background of the Mizo people. The ‘seven sisters’ of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram form a lesser-known corner of

India, in the northeast, forming a hook that reaches above and beyond the furthest borders of Bangladesh. Of these seven states, Mizoram is the southern-most, tucked between Bangladesh and Myanmar, whose borders meet just below. To its west lies Tripura, and to its north lie Assam and Manipur (see map, Appendix A). In stark contrast to the plains of its neighbours, Mizoram is a mountainous region with a rugged landscape and thick forests. Under British rule, this area was called the Lushai Hills, which at the time stretched across the modern-day borders of Myanmar and Bangladesh. Its people were known as the Lushais, a tribal people who lived a remote village existence and shared a similar culture and language.

The etymological origin of 'Lushai' is disputed, but the preferred tribal name 'Mizo' has a much clearer meaning, derived from *mi* meaning 'people' and *zo* meaning 'hill terrain'. *Ram* means 'land' or 'country', thus 'Mizoram' means 'Land of the Hill People'. As has already been alluded to, the tribal people of the surrounding areas are considered to be close ethnic relations of the Mizo people, sometimes called 'sub-tribes'. Within the present Mizo tribe, there are clans and sub-clans, a number of whom are still remembered to have played particularly powerful or influential roles in Mizo history. These include the Sailo and Ralte clans for example (Nunthara 1996: 44).

The region was renamed the Mizo Hills in 1954 and was established as the state of Mizoram in 1987. With improved education and quality of life, it is now the third most literate state in India<sup>4</sup>, after Kerala and Lakshadweep, while also continuing to be one of the least-populated with a population of just one million (2011). Although missionary activity was taking place throughout the northeast of India at the end of the nineteenth century, its impact among the Mizo people was remarkable in that it led to rapid conversions of entire villages within just three decades. As a result, the Mizo people now claim to be 100% Christian, although in the 2001 census the state itself was returned as 90.5% Christian<sup>5</sup> probably due in part to the increasing number of non-Mizo inhabitants.

It is widely accepted that the Mizo people originated as an ethnic group in the region of Tibet, and possibly at an even earlier stage in what is now Mongolia. It has also been suggested, with reference to the Chinlung legend also found among the Chin people, that they were among the ethnic peoples who helped to build the Great Wall of China (see Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 10-11 and Sakhong 2003: 1-2)<sup>6</sup>. A nomadic people, it is assumed that they travelled east and

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<sup>4</sup> [theonlinegk.wordpress.com/2011/04/02/literacy-rate-in-indian-state-census-2011](http://theonlinegk.wordpress.com/2011/04/02/literacy-rate-in-indian-state-census-2011)

<sup>5</sup> [censusindia.gov.in/Tables\\_Published/SCST/dh\\_st\\_mizoram.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_mizoram.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The various forms of the Chinlung legend involve the emergence of humanity from a hole, whether from the earth, a cave or a rock. Vanlalchhuanawma assigns credibility to the theory that this hole was actually a gap in the Great Wall of China through which the people made their escape.

then south to the Burmese region before eventually settling further west in the Mizo hills in the seventeenth century (Thanmawia 2009: 17). The Mizo language is tonal, and its grammar indicates that it belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, thus establishing their closer ethnic relationship to the Tibeto-Burmese people-groups than to the people of the Indian plains. Most of the traditional (and now mostly obsolete) musical instruments also appear to be descended from those found in Myanmar.

This nomadic story indicates just some of the challenges faced by the British and Indian governments in their classification of the Mizo people within Indian society. The appellation 'indigenous' might be inappropriate given their relatively recent settlement, yet there seems to be no archaeological evidence of a people-group who previously populated the region, and it is quite unusual in India in having no prior history of Hindu or Muslim contact. In spite of this, 'indigenous' is not widely used in the Mizo context, but neither is *adivasi*, the Sanskrit word meaning 'first settlers' that seems to pervade much tourist literature<sup>7</sup> and plains-Indian language when referring to tribal Indians. Instead both the Indian government and the Mizo people have settled for 'tribal', a term that emphasises ethnic unity (see Thanzauva 1997: 11-16 for a more detailed discussion).

However, the modern political designation of 'Scheduled Tribe', with its mixed benefits and often derogatory connotations, was not established without significant resistance. The 1960's saw what is widely regarded as the darkest period in recent Mizo history, such that the State Day which falls on the 20<sup>th</sup> February is celebrated with a somewhat bitter remembrance of the struggles which finally resulted in the formation of Mizoram as a state. The period is known as the 'groupings', in which the Indian government burned and regrouped many Mizo villages in order to suppress insurgency after the Mizo National Front (MNF) had organised a violent uprising in 1966, demanding independence from India. Despite the devastation brought by the soldiers, the fires and even the airstrikes, it can retrospectively be seen to have been one of the main factors besides the missionary work which resulted in the type of society that is found in Mizoram today. Villages no longer follow exactly the same way of life and have all undergone various degrees of modernisation. Whereas the major urban centres of Aizawl and Lunglei were established by the missionaries, the southern town of Lawngtlai is a direct result of this period, in which many villagers from surrounding areas were forced to group together and form a new urban community.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example the Lonely Planet Guide to Northeast India (Bindloss 2009).

The nature of the traditional village life need not be discussed at length here, as the topic has been given more thorough attention by Mizo scholars and the aspects pertinent to this musical study will be brought to light in the main thesis. As a general overview it is known from the accounts of nineteenth-century colonialists and missionaries<sup>8</sup> that the Mizo people lived in small highland village communities. Bamboo was the main natural resource, and they survived on a system of agriculture known as *jhum* cultivation, a destructive slash and burn procedure which is still practised today due to the absence of and resistance to more sustainable alternatives. The village chiefs and the elders formed the head of the village society, and status could also be obtained by being a successful hunter or warrior. Community celebrations of hunts, battles and turning points in the agricultural seasons always included song and dance, and were never without the native rice-beer *zu*. Indeed, this strong alcoholic drink caused some of the diplomatic difficulties faced by the British colonialists, as Reid (1893: 235) writes, ‘it was hard to get any political business transacted... chiefs were found to be hopelessly drunk and remained so for weeks.’ The missionaries had attempted to prohibit alcohol amongst Christians, for social rather than doctrinal reasons (Chapman<sup>9</sup> 1968: 112), and eventually the state sought to resolve the issue by banning alcohol in 1996.

Fewer villages depend so heavily on bamboo in modern days, and most now have access to electricity. Chieftainship ended in 1952 so that the churches now dominate society, organised in a hierarchical manner with the administration of fellowship groups for all members. Beyond the church, the Young Mizo Association (YMA), established in 1935, is the primary cross-denominational group which seeks to propagate a strong sense of Mizo identity in the face of increased western influence<sup>10</sup>. Likewise, the MNF who famously staged the 1966 uprising is now a political party representing the conservative Mizo stance. As an Indian state, Mizoram is now administrated by a Governor and elected Chief Minister, as well as a Legislative Assembly of 40 members.

## 1.2 Research Context and Methodology

The fieldwork for this research was conducted in Mizoram from October 2011 until March 2012. My research context was multi-faceted because I travelled under the supervision of BMS World Mission, the same Baptist organisation which sent the first missionaries to Mizoram<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example McCall 1949 and the collections of missionary reports by Thanzauva 1997 and the Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Edith Chapman, a Baptist missionary who pioneered girls’ education in Mizoram.

<sup>10</sup> Their website is [www.centralyma.org.in](http://www.centralyma.org.in).

<sup>11</sup> These missionaries were Lorrain and Savidge who arrived for their first visit in 1894 through the Arthington Mission. They returned in 1903 to begin work in earnest, this time with BMS.



BMS's missionary work in the area ended officially in 1968, but they have maintained contact with the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM). My work from the BMS perspective primarily involved teaching music at the Academy of Integrated Christian Studies (AICS), the Baptist theological institution in the state capital, Aizawl. Working alongside another Mizo teacher who had gained his music qualification in the Philippines, we established Mizoram's first Diploma in Church Music course in November 2011, aimed at high school leavers.



**Figure 2:** View of Aizawl from Ramhlun North Baptist Church. (Photo: Author)

Aizawl's urban sprawl stretches along a steep mountainside. The AICS campus is situated about 40 minutes' drive away from the city centre. It was established in 1999 and now provides postgraduate theological training to about 100 students, and in March 2012 it gained full affiliation with the Senate of Serampore College in West Bengal. The students come from the northeastern states as well as Bangladesh and Myanmar, but the college is a strictly English-speaking community. It has a close administrative relationship with BCM which is based in Lunglei, in the south of Mizoram. Aizawl itself is predominantly Presbyterian, with the Synod based in the city. This is because of the way in which the first two groups of missionaries (Presbyterians and Baptists) chose to organise themselves into northern and southern regions respectively.

The multi-cultural nature of the community meant that AICS provided a neutral base from which to begin my research. Indeed, contact with members of neighbouring tribal communities provided a broader perspective and understanding of Mizoram's place and situation in the wider Northeast-Indian context. The principal (and founder of the college), Rev. Dr. RL Hnuni, is a pioneer amongst Mizo women, becoming the first woman to be ordained in March 2012. Her husband, Rev. Dr. K Thanzauva, was President of BCM until March 2012 and has authored a number of books which make valuable contributions to the study of Christianity in Mizo society, including *Towards Tribal Theology* (1989) and *Theology of Community* (2004).

I accompanied Dr. Hnuni on as many of her preaching and visiting engagements as possible, visiting at least one new church each week. During the Christmas vacation I primarily stayed in Lunglei, and had excellent opportunities to experience Mizo Christmas worship, the details of which will form a significant part of this thesis. In addition to Aizawl and Lunglei, I made brief visits to the town of Lawngtlai and the village of Putlungasih as shown on the map (Appendix A). My copies of the Mizo hymnal *Kristian Hla Bu* in both its tonic sol-fa and staff notation forms<sup>12</sup> were invaluable for documentation and for helping me participate during services. Using my recordings, I studied the melodies and phonetics of these songs each week and made it a priority to take at least some initial steps towards becoming a confident participant in the congregation, by not hesitating to sing and dance as far as I felt it was possible and appropriate in each setting.

All the personal interviews were obtained after having first established a friendly rapport with the individuals, in many cases over the course of several months. In this way I could build on previous informal conversations to ask meaningful questions that I knew would be pertinent to the thoughts and contexts of each speaker. The interviews were conducted individually in my own residence using an audio recorder. This was with the exception of Rev. Killuaia who was interviewed in his own home in Lunglei. Each interviewee consented formally to the process and was previously informed of the possible subjects and questions that the interview might cover.

### 1.3 Limitations and Scope

It is necessary to recognise the limitations of this research, both those that were consciously constructed, and those which could not be avoided. This must first contain a frank evaluation

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<sup>12</sup> *Kristian Hla Bu* is in its 18<sup>th</sup> edition, 2005. The staff notation edition, *Pathian Fakna Hla Bu* is a new publication from 2009.



of my identity in the field: a self-reflection inspired by the thoughts presented in *Shadows in the Field* (Barz; Cooley 2008), recognising that fieldwork is affected by the impact of one's own presence as well as the shadows of former visitors. In the Mizo context, a considerable shadow that was already present was that of the pioneer missionaries whose work contributed to the formation of modern Mizo society. These missionaries are fondly revered by the Mizo people, with their arrival commemorated every year on Missionary Day on 11<sup>th</sup> January, and countless halls and buildings named after them. As such, the surprising presence of a white visitor prompts a reaction of deep respect rather than any hostility. The utterance of *Sap!* ('white person') in the street might become *Sap dik tak* ('really true [genuine/authentic] white person') when it is discovered that I am British. The assumption is often that British visitors are descendants of the early British missionaries; this unwarranted admiration carries a significant element of responsibility.

And what shadow am I leaving? Perhaps this is a subject that will need to be revisited several years from now, and it should not dominate this thesis. But the question was never far from my mind, as I reflected upon the apparent contradiction between my daily teaching of staff notation and western musical concepts in the classroom, and my academic preoccupation with *lengkhawm*. But as this thesis will demonstrate, the western-looking band ensemble of guitars and keyboard have long been an integrated part of Mizo musical life and are not necessarily perceived as foreign when they play alongside the traditional drums in church (see Chapter 5). Thus my teaching of piano, staff notation and aural skills using my western musical background was accepted as a contribution to the development of a musicality which is and which will remain Mizo. It is what I had been invited to do.

Perhaps the greatest limitation of the scope of this thesis lies in the fact that my affiliation with a Baptist organisation and location in a Baptist institution meant that I had almost no opportunity to experience worship outside the Baptist church. There is at present a sharp divide between the Presbyterian and Baptist churches, due to their history of geographical split between the north and south<sup>13</sup>, and a large number of smaller denominations are also present<sup>14</sup>. I am confident, through conversations, having watched broadcasts of non-Baptist services on television and because the primary hymnal is shared by the Baptists and Presbyterians, that most of what I experienced and my conclusions can be extended beyond

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<sup>13</sup> 51.3% of Mizo Christians are Presbyterian while only 15.9% are Baptist, but the disparity in population for each denomination is less significant than their more equal geographical distribution between north and south.

<sup>14</sup> See the Statistical Handbook of Mizoram 2010. UPC 14.9%; Salvation Army 6.07%; Seventh Day Adventist 3.02% and Roman Catholic 2.12%.

the Mizo Baptist context. But the fact remains that there will be moments when this thesis will need to be limited to the Baptist church to maintain its integrity. The reader may then be encouraged to extend the scope of my findings to other denominations according to his or her own knowledge and experience.

It must also be acknowledged that six months was a relatively short time to spend in the field. It would have been beneficial to have experienced the cycle of at least one year, including the seasonal changes and all the major festivals as well as the complete academic year at the college. Between October and March I experienced the shift to a mild winter and back again, Christmas, New Year and the revived traditional festival of *Chapchar Kut*. I missed the entire rainy season, Easter and two other more minor festivals: *Mim Kut* and *Pawl Kut*.

Given the short time spent in Mizoram, and my residence in an English-speaking community, it is also regrettable that I could not dedicate sufficient time to thorough language study. A better grasp of the Mizo language would have been invaluable to this thesis to explain song meanings and to conduct more meaningful interviews. Nevertheless, I was able to acquire two lexical fields to a reasonable degree. The field of everyday conversation, including buying goods and common greetings, led to an improved understanding of common grammatical structures and vocabulary which helped me to at least follow a conversation. The second field was that of the theological or spiritual terms and phrases, especially those found in songs. As I learnt to sing an increasing number of songs, I came to recognise many of the recurring themes and words so that I could follow the meanings of some of the simpler hymns. My study of the language through the songs and the Mizo Bible has continued in the UK with reference to Ropianga's dictionary (2008) and continued contact with members of AICS.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

A significant body of literature has already been generated from within Mizoram which particularly addresses the cultural, social and political history of the Mizo people. Aizawl is home to Mizoram University (MZU), Aizawl Theological College (ATC) and the Academy of Integrated Christian Studies (AICS), and a cursory view of a Mizo bibliography, bookshop or library will show that scholarship focusing on the Mizo context has been a popular pursuit for many decades, both in the English and Mizo languages. The Mizo Theological Association promotes inter-denominational dialogue amongst scholars. The Department of Tribal Studies was introduced by Thanzauva at the Eastern Theological College (ETC) in Jorhat, Assam, in order to provide a space for focused theological study in the tribal context. Indeed, the Senate

of Serampore College, to which AICS, ATC and ETC are all affiliated, demands that every thesis submitted must contain specific application to an aspect of the Indian context.

In an otherwise saturated area of study within Mizoram the absence of any musicological contribution to scholarship in the Mizo context becomes apparent at the Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) in Delhi. Part of the American Institute of Indian Studies, it aims to be a fundamental resource for all music researchers in India. Field recordings and publications contribute to an ever-growing collection which is publicly available. However, besides the scarcity of written references to Mizo music, even the University of Oxford Expedition to North Eastern India of 2009<sup>15</sup> proves to disappoint, with recordings barely reaching Tripura, and completely omitting Mizoram.

In Mizoram itself, musicology is not yet a discipline that has attracted scholarly attention; *lengkhawm zai* has rarely been analysed as a musical tradition, although passing references are made to it in sociological, historical and sometimes theological studies. As for the lack of study from outsiders, this may be due to the simple reason that, until 2011, long-term access to Mizoram was highly restricted. Visitors even from other Indian states required a special permit, and most foreigners could not stay for more than two weeks. These rules were relaxed on a trial basis in 2011 and this was fortunately extended into 2012. Nevertheless, it remains surprising that no recordings or studies seem to have been conducted previously about the music of Mizoram, and one can only assume that its relative isolation has obscured it from the attention of ethnomusicologists.

This thesis explores the issues that surround the definition of modern traditions in Christian worship music in the context of *lengkhawm*, particularly addressing the nature of the exchanges that take place at the earlier points of missionary contact. Chapter 2 presents an account of *lengkhawm*'s history as a product of the revivals, but begins earlier with an acknowledgement of the singing and musical practices of Mizoram before Christianity. The key question here is: what kind of tradition is *lengkhawm*, and how did it emerge?

The third chapter asks: what does *lengkhawm zai* sound like, and why? This is a musical analysis of the vocal and melodic style of *lengkhawm zai*, identifying the features of the Mizo *thluk* (tune). It is the singing style and melody that most immediately differentiate *lengkhawm zai* from the western music of the missionaries, yet some elements bear significant similarities to those found in the hymn-singing of nineteenth-century America for example. This raises the issue of compatibility when a new tradition is formed through an encounter between

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<sup>15</sup> [www.northeastindiaexpedition.org.uk](http://www.northeastindiaexpedition.org.uk)

different musical styles. What are the reasons for retaining characteristics, and what are the reasons for adopting new elements?

The fourth chapter explores in greater depth the relationship between *lengkhawm* and traditional Mizo society as it is understood today. It seeks to understand the factors that led to the formation of *lengkhawm* as an appropriate tradition, suited to the Mizo sense of spirituality and expressing values that had also been important in traditional Mizo life before Christianity. However, this traditional life is also identified to have been more localised in character than is often suggested. To what extent can *lengkhawm* be understood as traditionally Mizo?

*Lengkhawm* is still important in modern Mizo worship, and the fifth chapter presents an ethnographic account of the other elements of *lengkhawm* which characterise it today, including the dance, the chanting and the instruments. Though remaining fairly constant, the tradition has responded to modern developments including the use of other instruments such as the guitar and keyboard. *Lengkhawm* has both resisted and responded to modernity, so how does this affect its status as a modern tradition? Its appearance alongside contemporary worship forms and on television presents a new perspective in our attempt to understand its identity.

## 2. Birth of a Tradition: The History of *Lengkhawm*

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In assessing the extent to which *lengkhawm zai* can be described as traditional singing, there are two historical themes that must be explored. Firstly, we must identify which styles of music are considered to be ‘traditional’ within Mizo culture today. This would tend to include all music and dance which existed before Christianity<sup>16</sup> and which have continued to be practised in cultural performance contexts. Does *lengkhawm* belong to this repertoire? Secondly, the history of *lengkhawm* should be traced as accurately as possible, in order to understand how and why it emerged, and how this should affect our understanding of it as a modern tradition. This chapter therefore presents *lengkhawm* as a product of the spiritual revivals, but begins with an acknowledgement of the singing and musical practices of Mizoram before Christianity.

Hobsbawm’s contribution (1983) to the idea of the ‘invention of tradition’ is very relevant here. However, there is a danger that such a focus can lead to a mis-placed preoccupation with the suggestion that invented traditions carry delusional connotations regarding their provenance and ancient significance. In contrast to many of the case studies that form the basis of the critiques of Hobsbawm and his contemporaries, it must be acknowledged that *lengkhawm* is not practised under the pretence of it being an ancient Mizo tradition. The simple facts of Mizoram’s recent Christian history preclude this. But conversely, the ‘traditions’ and the ‘traditional values’ to which it is said to embody and belong, might present examples of traditions which are more recently constructed than is often accepted.

Furthermore, as Sarot has highlighted (2001: 21-22), there are other possible frameworks besides Hobsbawm’s emphasis on the invariability of tradition. For example, Popper (1963) emphasises the diverse functions of tradition which can indeed permit or serve to provide a validating basis for change. In the context of *lengkhawm*, we are addressing a religious tradition that emerged out of a dynamic interaction between perceptions of former tradition and the significance of the new Christian tradition. This chapter will conclude with an extended discussion of the implications of these ideas on the historical Mizo context outlined below.

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<sup>16</sup> Henceforth, such phrases as ‘before Christianity’ refer to the time before Christianity became the dominant religion of the area in the 1930’s.

## 2.1 Before Christianity

It is difficult to present an accurate picture of musical life before Christianity. There is little contemporary documentation, yet much has been written by modern scholars who use relatively recent sources from colonialists and missionaries from the second half of the nineteenth century as well as archived newspapers and church documents. Even songs which are said to have been passed down through generations are likely to have changed. However, the following presents a summary of the conclusions given by scholars in Northeast India.

The earliest known music of the Mizo people consists of songs sung before the seventeenth-century settlement in Mizoram. Although the documentation of this music is scarce, it can be inferred that songs and dances that traditionally employ gongs or which make references to the language and environment of the Chin Hills probably date from nearer this time. I am not yet qualified to present such a linguistic analysis of my own, but offer this as a possible validation for the assertions of Mizo and other Northeast-Indian writers about the history of their songs. One such writer is Kipgen<sup>17</sup> (1997: 69) who cites *chin lentlang* as among the earliest Mizo songs, sung at hunting celebrations around 1500, but there are others such as *thuthmun zai* and *salulam hla*, which some claim to date from 1350 (Ibid: 95, although Kipgen considers such a date to be unlikely).

The different types of songs sung in the Chin Hills are listed variously by all major scholars, but Kipgen's presentation (Ibid: 97) is the most thorough. They included a gong lament (*dar hla*), two types of lullabies (*naupang hla* and *nau awih hla*), three types of heroic songs (*hlado*, *sakhua leh inthawina hla* and *bawh hla*) and the dancing and feasting songs of *chai hla* and *chawnchen zai*. The latter two were genres containing numerous sub-categories and the Mizo scholar Lawmsanga is of the opinion that they emerged much later in the nineteenth century. It is indeed likely that their presently-known forms, performed at cultural displays and festivals, are of a relatively recent style, but Kipgen cites two earlier composers of *chai hla*, namely Thailungi of the seventeenth century and Lalvunga of the eighteenth century.

According to Khiantge and Thanmawia, both Mizo writers, the songs were originally in couplet form (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries) and later developed into triplet form (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries). It is suggested that were composed 'spontaneously', emphasising an outpouring of emotion rather than poetic construction (Khiantge 2006: 124-5 and Thanmawia 2009: 17-20), although this is probably based on knowledge of similar chants composed at the turn of the twentieth century rather than on any contemporary documentary

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<sup>17</sup> A Kuki writer from Manipur based at ETC, Assam.

evidence. These songs had a chant-like tune, described by Lawmsanga as a ‘monotonous tune of low notes’, particularly the *barhhla* and *hlado* genres of songs for warriors and hunters<sup>18</sup>. Lawmsanga’s description (2010: 168) has almost certainly come from his personal knowledge of these songs in the forms in which they are encountered at special cultural events in modern times. We cannot be sure how they sounded three hundred years ago, yet it could be argued that for the purposes of understanding the sound of *lengkhawm zai* and its origins, we only need to be able to estimate how such songs were sung at the beginning of the twentieth century, as this was the actual musical context out of which *lengkhawm* emerged. An excellent description of a traditional ‘chant-like tune’ dating from this period comes from Mrs Angus, a friend of Lorrain’s who visited the southern missionaries with her husband in 1932. In her report, she describes an occasion in which they had stopped for the night, and the Lushai ‘coolies’ started to sing songs around the fire:

...a single line given out by one man and ‘sung’ over and over in a monotone, some of them taking a most extraordinary deep note and others an octave higher – the whole effect like a Jew’s harp. (Angus, handwritten report: 26-27)

Her observation is strikingly similar to Lawmsanga’s modern description, suggesting that the sound of the chanting and hunting songs that is experienced today is not very different from that which was known during the 1920’s and 1930’s. The low part-singing, however, resembling a drone in Mrs Angus’ description, is not a feature that I have found to have been observed frequently elsewhere.

Kipgen (1997: 100) asserts that the migration to Mizoram between 1600 and 1796 was the period in which the songs acquired in the Chin Hills were improved and consolidated, leading to the emergence of known song-composers and styles. Styles were often named after their composer, such as *Pi Hmuaki zai* after the first-known named composer Pi Hmuaki. Khiangte (2006: 126) claims that each composer was associated with a distinctive ‘flow or tune of songs’, that could be recognised and named after that composer. This suggests that musical flow has long been an important means by which the Mizo people have understood their music, emphasising a melodic union of pitch, rhythm and meter that would have produced

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<sup>18</sup> Few accounts remain of these occasions of celebration, so the following isolated example from a British expedition in 1899 is frequently cited by other scholars: ‘The raiders carried with them forty heads of the slain [out of 150] as a trophy... The heads were arranged in a row, and an earthen vessel filled with rice, curry and boiled eggs, and a bamboo chungu containing liquor were placed by each head, while the victors drank and danced round them... This food was given, not out of derision, but in order that the disembodied spirits might not haunt the visitors, but travel in peace to the city of the dead... the soldiery then proceeded to dance round the tree [just planted before the chief’s house], firing blank ammunition at the heads.’ (Chatterji, ed. 1978: 25-26)

recognisable styles from individual composers, much like the tune (*thluk*) of *lengkhawm zai* which is studied in the following chapter.

The drum (Hornbostel-Sachs 212.212.1, see Figure 24 in Chapter 5) which is now an indispensable part of *lengkhawm*, only saw widespread use as late as the nineteenth century, according to Lawmsanga (2010: 168), but performances of traditional songs tend to employ a longer barrel-shaped drum (Hornbostel-Sachs 211.222.1). Perhaps this is the drum referred to by Kipgen (1997: 54-55) in his list of musical instruments introduced from the Chin Hills. The drum was called the *kawlkhuang*, and there was also a large and small gong (*darkhuang* and *darmang*). These gongs could be played as a set of two (*darngun*) or three (*darbu*). Again, these Burmese instruments are now only exhibited at cultural displays and festivals. These, and the other historical details pertaining to instrumental music, are areas certainly worthy of further study but do not bear sufficient significance to our understanding of *lengkhawm*.



Figure 3: Lammual, Aizawl, during Chapchar Kut, 2nd March 2012. Main stage is to the left of the picture, adorned in yellow bamboo decoration. (Photo: Author)

Of all the dances once performed alongside the celebration songs of *chai hla* and *chawnchen hla*, only a few have been preserved at festivals and displays, the most important being *chai*



*lam* and *chheih lam*. In 1949, the colonialist McCall<sup>19</sup> wrote in his memoirs that ‘the traditional dances, we may recall, have nearly died out’ (1949: 219). The annual festival of Chapchar Kut is now one of the few opportunities for these songs and dances to be practised and performed in public. It is traditionally a festival celebrated during the time of rest between the agricultural season of cutting the bamboo and the subsequent season of burning it once it has dried. It used to last approximately one week, but its modern form is as a one-day state holiday, with larger towns offering a highly-organised programme of events in an outdoor space: usually a converted sports field such as Aizawl’s Lammual (dancing and parade ground, see Figure 3).

*Chai lam*, danced to *chai hla*, was originally practised on the third day of Chapchar Kut (Lalrinawma<sup>20</sup> 2005: 143). A circle of alternating girls and boys would tread a ‘slow measure in time with the song’, while the central drummer ‘chanted continuously.’ There would also often be gong accompaniment (Pachau<sup>21</sup> 2009: 13). This supports the widespread view that the early music was slow and monotonous in style, even when used for celebration, however McCall also describes the common practice of gradually increasing the tempo up to a climax, aided by handclapping from spectators (1949: 209). We will see that this acceleration, if not the dance itself, appears to be a clear precedent for the *lengkhawm* style.

Lalrinawma (2005: 159) describes *chheih lam* as a dance of more recent origin, even post-1900, drawing this conclusion because it is a dance for the individual, rather than a group dance like *chai lam*. It is described by McCall thus:

Movements were jerky... The postures were often difficult - knees bent, one leg kicked straight out in front, while the body was supported on the other bended knee. While the dance lasts it is attractive, and has a tempo which is in itself very pleasant, with a hint of syncopation. (1949: 188-189)

Again, the movements described especially during the early revivals before *lengkhawm* fully emerged seem comparable to those of *chheih lam*, and some individuals continue to move in such a way during some songs in Christian contexts.

The traditional context out of which *lengkhawm* emerged in the 1920’s would therefore have consisted of modern renditions of songs and dances, whose slow and monotonous style was claimed to have been part of a centuries-old musical tradition, with a power to touch the Mizo ‘sentiment’ (see Chapter 4). However, the regular practice of this music was in decline at this

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<sup>19</sup> Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, 1931-1943 (Sharma, ed. 2006: 80).

<sup>20</sup> Lecturer, ATC.

<sup>21</sup> Professor of English, MZU.

time, as we see McCall mourning the loss of the dances and the instruments, and they were soon to be destined for the preservationist efforts of cultural displays and festivals.

## 2.2 Encountering the British

Before the missionaries came to Mizoram, there had already been numerous encounters with British colonialists. Many of these were brief expeditions, and subsequently included other individuals who were posted in the area for a longer period, including McCall and Shakespear<sup>22</sup>. The latter is credited with being the first to successfully administrate the region then known as the Lushai Hills, by retaining the chieftain system of the Mizo people and establishing their boundaries in 1897 (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 170).

As has been seen above, it is from these early colonialists that we know much of what has been recorded of traditional Mizo music, as was still being practised in the nineteenth century. But encounters with western music had already taken place to a small extent before the missionary work gained momentum. For example, the Presbyterian missionary Rowlands records the Christmas of 1899 (Ibid: 7), in which the British soldiers singing carols and celebrating in their compounds attracted the attention of Mizo villagers who would come to listen to them.

The Welsh evangelist William Williams has recently been identified as the first Christian to visit the area with a missionary purpose in 1891, but his short visit did not seem to have as significant an impact as the two missionaries Lorrain and Savidge who are more popularly regarded as the first missionaries to the Lushai Hills, arriving for the first time in 1894. They initially came through the Arthington Mission from London and remained for four years in which they studied the language and culture. When they returned for a second time in 1903, under the Baptist Missionary Society, Lorrain had successfully reduced the language to written form using roman script and had produced a dictionary and the first elements of a Bible. Meanwhile, the Welsh Presbyterian mission had also set up work in the region in 1899, establishing a mission compound in what is now Aizawl. This is where Lorrain and Savidge had come before, but on their second visit they agreed to move south, eventually establishing their compound in today's town of Lunglei. In the initial years the Presbyterian and Baptist missionaries worked closely together, sharing publications and resources, and both missions grew with new missionaries and their families joining the work over the course of several decades.

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<sup>22</sup> Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, 1880-1905 (others held the post in some intervening years, Sharma 2006: 79).

When it came to music, the missionaries are recorded as having actively attempted to adopt the tune of *chai hla* (see above) as a basis for Christian songs. But Lawmsanga writes that there was a rejection of this attempt by the Mizo Christians, the first being in the context of a *chai hla* version of the hymn 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross' (2010: 99). We can speculate as to the reasons; perhaps the new Christians feared the use of their pre-Christian music in their worship, or perhaps they considered the missionaries' appropriation of their cultural music to be insulting. When we consider the celebratory and festive function of *chai hla*, perhaps the sombre and serious meaning of the text felt incongruous with the music, even though the tune to a western ear would sound melancholic. Whatever the reason, Lawmsanga identifies this phenomenon quite simply as a 'self-alienation' from Mizo tunes (Ibid: 161). Kipgen (1997: 275) cites the missionary Mrs Sandy, who wrote in 1919 that 'the first Mizo Christians set aside any Mizo tune as profane.' However, such self-alienation after a major change in belief system or ideology is of course a common phenomenon; the initial desire to create distance between music associated with a former lifestyle is perhaps not surprising.

So the missionaries were compelled to write translations of their own hymns using their limited understanding of the language, and retaining the original tunes, beginning with seven songs in a handwritten book distributed in 1897. As a result, the early translations are very prosaic, due to the lack of awareness of the Mizo poetic language and conventions (documented by Shakespear 1912: 376). Mizo listeners assumed that this was 'how Christians must sing' (Lawmsanga 2010: 98). This unfortunately led to the premature demise of the Mizo poetic language, which later saw attempted revivals through some composers and the publication of a poetic dictionary<sup>23</sup>. The prosaic style of the missionaries was even imitated by early Mizo composers, the earliest perhaps being Thanga (1883-1957) who composed 'Kan Chatuan Pa Zawng Rawh Hu' in 1903. It exhorts the animist Mizo people to 'seek our eternal father, not spirits.' McCall (1949: 296) confirms that poetry initially fell from favour because of its association with the 'crude' subjects which they had enjoyed before the Christian influence, but he also remarks that a resurgence in the art was happening within the new Christian context after the revivals: this must surely refer to the songs that were composed at that time for *lengkhawm*.

Nevertheless, the western hymns that were eventually taught gained swift popularity even amongst those who did not fully comprehend or accept their meaning. As Rowlands writes in his report of 1900 (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 9), 'God's hymns, as they call them, have become very popular, and are known in many villages which we have not visited.' We find in Lorrain's

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<sup>23</sup> Thanmawia, *Dictionary of Mizo Poetic Terms*, 1988.

report of 1904 that it was the Mizo people themselves that held a deep fascination for the new songs which they were hearing, notably because they were sung without the assistance of *zu* (Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee<sup>24</sup>, ed. 1993: 12)<sup>25</sup>.

At this stage before the revival movement, the Mizo Christian community was still very small, but the missionaries persisted in their efforts and were particularly active in bringing about social reform through schools and hospitals, such that they had an impact on the wider society beyond their mission compounds. The colonialist Reid had shown remarkable foresight, writing before the missionaries entered the region:

There can be no doubt that the future of the Lushais will be similar [to the Welsh mission in the Khasi Hills of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century], whichever missionary denomination enters the field. A few years will see the hillsides dotted with schools, while the garrisons at Haka, Sangal Klang and Fort Tregear will be asked for subscriptions to build churches. (1893: 3)

Aware of the widespread enthusiasm for hymn-singing described above, the missionaries adopted numerous means for western music education that began to shape Mizo musical life even before the mass conversions brought about by the revivals.

The first major step towards a Mizo hymn collection was undoubtedly the first publication of the hymnal, *Kohhran Hla Bu*<sup>26</sup>, in 1899 (song texts only). In 1903 a *Kristian Hla Bu*<sup>27</sup> (its current name) was published separately by the Presbyterian Church (81 songs) and the Baptist Church (29 songs). However, this became a collaboration from 1908, when a collection of 293 songs was published for use in both the north and the south.

One of the first major decisions that was made related to the medium of notation that would be adopted when teaching songs. The Welsh missionary Jones confirms the early introduction of the Tonic Sol-fa system ‘which they very much like’, writing in 1901 (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 10). This was a natural choice as the system was already widespread in Wales, and it gained such popularity that even the Mizo people in the south had encountered it and resisted subsequent efforts by the Baptist missionary Lorrain to introduce Holman-Bentley’s staff-tonic

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<sup>24</sup> Hereafter MGCC.

<sup>25</sup> He writes that the older generation was amazed, while the younger generation, especially children, were eager to sing freely. One eleven-year-old boy is remembered for having been hesitant to pray but instead declaring ‘I’ll sing, for I can sing.’ (MGCC, ed. 1993: 11)

<sup>26</sup> Literally, ‘Church Song Book’.

<sup>27</sup> Literally, ‘Christian Song Book’, hereafter KHB.

system in 1908 (MGCC, ed. 1993: 27, 53)<sup>28</sup>. By 1904 even the Baptists were holding weekly singing classes (Ibid: 13), and tonic sol-fa became and has remained the only widely-understood form of musical notation in the region.

### 2.3 The Revival Movement

The scene has therefore been set for *lengkhawm* to emerge in a relatively new musical context in which 'traditional' music was still predominant, but in which a small number of Christian converts were singing a very different set of songs that were gaining widespread popularity even ahead of the Christian tradition itself. By far the most significant factor in the formation of the Mizo people as a Christian society was the period of spiritual revivals that began in 1906. These revivals were also instrumental in shaping the music of the Mizo people into what it has become today.

It is important to establish the definition of 'revival' in this context, in order to avoid confusion with its musical application as a resurgence of nearly obsolete musical styles and practices. This musical meaning can be applied to certain aspects of Mizo history, but in the context of 'the revivals', we refer to the spiritual revival, a phenomenon found throughout Christian history. In a Christian spiritual revival, a group of people collectively experience an intense spiritual transformation, which also affects their conduct. It usually leads to mass conversion to Christianity, as well as affecting the experience of other Christians. In the Mizo context described below, we must keep in mind that a spiritual revival is characterised by a mass people movement towards Christianity and a dramatic change in behaviour, often leading directly to social change.

The most common narrative identifies four distinct revivals, in 1906, 1913-1915, 1919-1923 and 1930. Though the exact dates vary depending on the locations being discussed, and although some have suggested that there was simply one revival that spanned these years, this thesis will maintain the common framework as the basis for the historical narrative. However, it is first important to note that Mizoram was not unique in its spiritual experience in 1906. In 1904-1905 a dramatic revival had affected Wales under the leadership of the preacher Evans Roberts. Stories of the 'Awakening', as it was called, would have reached the Welsh missionaries working not only in Mizoram but in other parts of Northeast India, and indeed it is likely that some of the missionaries would have been on furlough<sup>29</sup> in Wales for some of this

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<sup>28</sup> Mrs Holman-Bentley was a missionary to the Congo whose initial work, like Lorrain, included the publication of a dictionary and grammar of the local language as well as devising a staff-tonic system of musical notation.

<sup>29</sup> A period of leave granted to missionaries after a specified number of years abroad.

time and would have experienced it first-hand. It was not long before the Khasi Hills were experiencing a similar revival. The Khasi people live to the north of Mizoram, in what is now the state of Meghalaya, and Welsh missionaries had been working in their area since 1841.

### 2.3.1 The First and Second Revivals: 1905-1918

The Welsh in Aizawl had a strong Khasi connection, as three Khasi evangelists were already a part of their mission, so when rumours of a revival in the village of Mairang reached Aizawl in 1905, nine delegates were sent to witness it for themselves. In the words of Mrs Roberts, they found the Khasi people singing ‘a hymn of victory... all waving hands, swaying bodies and keeping time with their feet’ (Lalpekhluia 2007: 102) and Miss Thomas wrote that, ‘earnest, agonizing prayer, and the joyous strains of praise continued for hours together’ (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 28). Inspired by what they saw, the delegates returned to Aizawl full of high expectations. It is likely that this was the time that some of the hymns from the Khasi Tune Book were translated and introduced, many of which are still in the current edition of the *Kristian Hla Bu*. Some of these had already been contributed by the Khasi evangelists Siniboni and Simeon Rynjah, whether translations of western hymns or original texts set to known tunes<sup>30</sup>. However, it was the Mizo delegate and writer Thanga<sup>31</sup> who translated the ‘Khasi Revival Songs’<sup>32</sup>, most of which are in a distinctive couplet and triplet form. He had been composing since 1903 and composed ‘Misual ka ni’<sup>33</sup> as he travelled back from the Khasi revival (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 170). This song directly relates to the confessional theme of the revival highlighted below.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1906 the Mizo people in the north finally received the ‘blessing’ which they had been expecting. As has already been stated, the ‘Awakening’ was affecting other communities in the world at the same time, and it is remarkable to note that in the same week the well-documented Azusa Street revival began in Los Angeles (Pierson 2009: 304), and in the same year a similar revival was experienced in Korea (Ibid: 277). All of these revivals cite Wales as their stimulus, and the theme of each has been described as ‘confessional’, in which individuals were convicted<sup>34</sup> of their need for divine salvation and responded to the Christian message accordingly.

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<sup>30</sup> For Siniboni’s surviving songs see KHB 138, 326, 329, 427, 538 and 596. For Simeon Rynjah’s songs see KHB 255 and 416.

<sup>31</sup> Thanga’s songs still in print are KHB 35, 55, 75, 166, 171, 258, 312, 322, 328, 385, 392, 407, 434, 468, 476, 477, 489 and 496.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Khasi Harhna Hla’, printed in the 1908 KHB but later dropped from subsequent editions.

<sup>33</sup> Literally, ‘I am a sinner’.

<sup>34</sup> A Christian term meaning a personal acknowledgement; to be convinced of one’s sinful condition.

Music played an important role in this first revival, and Kipgen (1997: 219) writes that it was finally triggered by the singing of ‘God be with you till meet again’<sup>35</sup>, a hymn that had been popularised by the American revivalist Sankey at the end of the nineteenth century. There was little in the way of musical innovation, but the first revival led to mass conversion on a large scale, especially due to its confessional theme, so that the Mizo people were more prepared to experience the future changes to Christian music that the subsequent revivals would bring. Worship was characterised by unprecedented displays of emotion during worship services (Thanzaiva, ed. 1997: 29):

As soon as one of the missionaries had introduced any first service, the scene became indescribable, and it was hopeless for any preacher to gain the people’s attention. Scores, if not hundreds, were praying, singing, shouting and weeping at the same time... Four sermons were delivered during the day, but it was the singing, the praying and the direct messages which most deeply moved the people.

As will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4, this apparent emotionalism can be interpreted very helpfully from a Mizo perspective. Two related words refer to deep emotional sentiment, or as Lorrain put it in his dictionary, the ‘going out of the heart.’ The first is *lungleng*, a richly meaningful verb expressing longing for somewhere, something or someone with tenderness. The passive modification of this verb, *lunglen*, expresses how these objects stimulate such sentimentality in the person. A person can *lungleng* their homeland; their homeland can *lunglen* the person<sup>36</sup>.

When Mizo people speak of the ‘Mizo sentiment’, as they often do (see Chapter 4), they are referring to *lunglen* (as a noun). When *lengkhawm zai* ‘touches the heart’, they are referring to the quality of *lungleng* (as an adjective) that the song or the atmosphere possesses. Traditionally, this language would only have been applied to those whose life and work seemed governed by such a sentimentality, namely the poets and composers. As we have seen, early Mizo song composition was described as an ‘outpouring of emotion.’ Through the revival this had become no longer limited to the few artistic personalities but could be experienced deeply by many people (Kipgen 1997: 252). The Mizo people understood that the exclusive feeling of *lunglen* had become accessible to all through the new spirituality and this would also have prepared a much larger population for the musical changes that were to come in future years.

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<sup>35</sup> KHB 572: ‘Kan inhmuh, kan intawh leh hma zawng’ (trans. Rev. E Rowlands)

<sup>36</sup> My awareness of this terminology first came from the Kuki scholar Kipgen (1997: 252), however his usage and grammatical understanding of the concept is slightly more generalised than my own, which is based on examination of Lorrain’s dictionary and personal conversations.

The Baptists in the south received the revival a year later in 1907, and it is at this time that Lorrain documents what appear to be the beginnings of two aspects of Mizo worship that continue to be characteristic today: mass spoken prayer, and the *zaikhawm*. He recounts that prayer meetings during the revival had become needlessly long because each individual felt compelled to take their turn to pray, even if they simply repeated earlier prayers that had been said. His solution (MGCC, ed. 1994: 38) was to encourage the members to pray aloud simultaneously, so that everyone could be satisfied that they had contributed to the prayer meeting. This practice, now called ‘mass spoken prayer’ continues to be a staple feature in Mizo worship. The practice of *zaikhawm*, singing together for a long time as a community, only became an established worship context in later years, but the seed can be seen in Lorrain’s account from the first revival, in which children would sing for hours in each other’s houses on Sunday evenings, such that ‘they never seem to weary’ (Ibid: 41). This will form a part of this discussion in subsequent chapters, but it is helpful to establish that singing as a community in this way, without growing weary, was already becoming an important part of Mizo Christian worship at this early stage.

Such intimate community gatherings for worship have characterised most revival movements that have been studied historically, such as the Methodist and Pietist movements, according to the theologian Pierson (2009: 237). The biblical account of Pentecost is cited as the precedent for all revival phenomena, and the narrative found in the second chapter of the book of Acts has determined much of the discourse through which spiritual revivals are understood by those who are involved. In particular, the Greek notion of *koinonia*<sup>37</sup>, expresses the behaviour of the early believers described in Acts 2:42-47:

...all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all people.<sup>38</sup>

As we have seen, meeting for prayer and singing in each other’s homes was a feature even of the first Mizo revival that would later become the *zaikhawm*. *Zaikhawm* and *lengkhawm* can be understood to be musical forms that express or symbolise the ideals of revivalist *koinonia*. ‘*Khawm*’ in both words literally refers to ‘togetherness’, whether singing (*zai*) or gathering (*leng*) together. They cannot, by definition, be individualist activities. As will be discussed in

<sup>37</sup> κοινωνία: Fellowship through communion (Strong’s G2842).

<sup>38</sup> All Bible references are from the *English Standard Version (Anglicized Edition)*, 2002.



Chapter 4, togetherness or community is an important part of Mizo culture, so it is not surprising that the most successful and long-lasting expressions of *koinonia* took the form of these indigenised worship genres.

The first revival was immediately followed by quite a different movement, Puma Zai, which spread throughout the Lushai Hills in 1907-8 with much the same alacrity. Puma Zai was a new song that was danced to a much more ecstatic version of the dance *chheih lam*. *Chheih lam* involved squatting and singing to the bamboo tube or drum beat, and joining the dance individually as the tempo rose. As was usual with *chheih hla*<sup>39</sup>, the lyrics were spontaneous, but always included the refrain 'puma', an ambiguous word with no agreed definition. The song became a movement that spread from village to village and the lyrics were often adapted to flatter the chief in order for the practice of the song to gain acceptance and approval.

Initially, the movement seemed hostile to Christianity, and was regarded by the missionaries as an obstacle to growth after the revival. Lorrain heard claims that it would 'silence forever the Christian hymns' (MGCC, ed. 1994: 48). Lloyd declared it to be a 'revival of heathenism' (cited in Lawmsanga 2010: 69). The song in its original form promised exemption from the sacrifices that were part of the obligations of the animist rites, thus apparently presenting an alternative to the new religion offered by the missionaries. After the initial energy of the movement, the tune became a permanent part of the Mizo cultural song and dance repertoire, becoming known by the less provocative name *tlanglam zai*.

However, most scholars now have a more positive attitude to Puma Zai when examined in hindsight (see Lalpekhluia 2007: 107). Despite its apparently anti-Christian tone, it served as a preparation for the future revivals because it showed the Mizo people that the tune and the dances that they had enjoyed in the past could be enjoyed ecstatically even without the help of alcohol (Puma Zai was remarkable for its lack of dependence on *zu*). It also sparked an appreciation for the old style of music in the children, who would be young adults by the time of the next revival in 1919.

Another revival phase is generally identified as taking place between 1913 and 1915, but little significant musical innovation or development seems to have arisen out of these years, as far as can be identified in the missionary reports. However, the translation of western hymns did accelerate at this time, and by 1915 the collaborative KHB had grown to 450 hymns, 193 of which had been composed or translated by Mizo writers. It is important to remember that at this stage the tunes would all have been western in origin or style, so that the repertoire of

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<sup>39</sup> *Hla* refers to the song, *lam* refers to the dance.

western hymnody in the early years was already vast. A guide to tonic sol-fa was published by the Presbyterian missionary Evans in 1910<sup>40</sup>, and by 1915 Lorrain reported that the Baptist singers had engaged with the system so well that they were ‘able to take their respective parts which adds greatly to the attractiveness of the singing’ (MGCC, ed. 1994: 129). Here we can see that in the shared use of hymns and musical resources and publications, Evans seems right to have said in 1911 that the two denominations were ‘able to work together in perfect harmony’ (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 37).

### 2.3.2 The Third Revival: 1919-1929

The first revival unfolded in two parts, first in the Presbyterian north and later in the Baptist south. By contrast, the third revival was remarkable for its simultaneity. As news of the revival spread, it became apparent that three villages had all experienced the same phenomenon at the same time, on the 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1919. Nisapui is north of Aizawl, Thingsai is in the far east close to the border with Myanmar, and Zotlang is close to the Baptist compound in Lunglei. It even became clear that the same song had triggered the revival in each case: a translation of a hymn obtained from the Khasi Tune Book, ‘Aw Thlarau Thianghlim, Lo Kal La’<sup>41</sup>. It had been part of the standard hymn repertoire since 1908. An invocation of the Holy Spirit, this song was sung all day and night for several days (Lorrain in MGCC, ed. 1994: 153), again pre-empting the *zaikhawm* tradition just as in the first revival. However, this song of invocation was just a prelude to the ensuing revival which continued into the 1920’s (Ibid: 158); Lalpekhluva (2007: 111-112) states that the theme that dominated the third revival was actually that of the anticipated second coming of Jesus<sup>42</sup>.

The musical changes wrought by this revival would have a lasting impact on Mizo worship. The 1919 revival, in both Nisapui (Lalrinawma 2005: 220) and Thingsai (Lawmsanga 2010: 178), is cited as the moment that the *khuang* (drum) was first introduced to accompany the ecstatic singing and dancing (Pachua 2002: 121 and Kipgen 1997: 238). After two decades of resistance to traditional instruments and music, the introduction of the drum was enormously indicative of a change in attitude. As will be described in Chapter 5, the drum would beat the pulse of the music, keeping time but also guiding the tempo changes.

With the drum being associated with the traditional dances described above, it was perhaps inevitable that the third revival was also the point at which the Mizo people started to dance

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<sup>40</sup> This was a translation of a book that he had already written during his time in the Khasi Hills.

<sup>41</sup> Literally, ‘Oh Holy Spirit, Come’ (KHB 308, trans. Leta)

<sup>42</sup> The apocalyptic Christian belief that Jesus will return derives from numerous passages in the Bible, notably 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17.

in a collective circle, their feet matching the gradually accelerating beat of the drum (Kipgen 1997: 260). The compulsion to spontaneously dance in this way and to follow the increasing tempo directly relates to the characteristics of *chheih*, especially in its popularised form in the recent and controversial Puma Zai. The importance of the circle and the group participation also reflects elements of *chai lam*, although the expression and choreography is more individual and less co-ordinated.

Compared with the other ecstatic movements of the earlier revivals, it can be said that the circle dance that appeared during the third revival was much more Mizo in its clear heritage from the traditional dances, its relationship to the traditional drum as well as the absence of such dancing in areas of possible influence such as Wales or the Khasi Hills. Whereas the first revival had evidently resembled the Welsh and Khasi in character, and resulted in a large number of Christian converts, the third marked the beginning of a new but indigenous Mizo Christian identity expressed through an ownership of the worship style in the form of the drum and the dance. This was not yet called *lengkhawm* or *zaikhawm*, but their emergence was clearly imminent. According to Lorrain (MGCC, ed. 1994: 153), the revival especially touched the existing Christians, giving them a new spiritual experience, rather than drawing large numbers of new converts.

The 1920's, the years following this revival, were characterised by a gradual development of Mizo composition (Pachauau 2002: 107), firstly in the re-introduction of some poetic language in the Mizo translations and original texts, and subsequently in the modification of the tune used for these hymns. From 1919 onwards young composers such as Kamlala (1902-1965) and Huala (1902-1995) began to compose texts that employed some of the traditional poetic language<sup>43</sup>.

Jones reports in 1924 that the revival had especially affected the young children (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 67). It is significant to note his observation that there was a prevalent belief that there could be 'no religion' if it did not involve 'singing, dancing, quaking and swooning.' This is a typically revivalist attitude, but it expresses something of the intensity with which the Mizo people valued these physical manifestations as an important part of their Christian identity. As has already been alluded to, such behaviour has become inextricably tied to the Mizo songs. Lawmsanga (2010: 152) further describes the children's behaviour as *khurh lam*, a quaking dance in which refusal to submit to the body's urge to move could result in pain or temporary paralysis. Again, such phenomena are not uncommon today, even outside the

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<sup>43</sup> For songs by Kamlala see KHB 14, 71, 95, 115, 377, 378, 455 and 574. For songs by Huala see KHB 456, 464 and 493.

former revival context, and in my experience they are explained using the language and terminology of 'Mizo spirituality'.

The musical distinction between Mizo and non-Mizo spirituality had also started to emerge at this point, with Jones further observing that not all the hymns would have the same effect on the children; we can identify this to be a new selectiveness in favour of a sound which touched the Mizo sentiment, in contrast to the former selectiveness that avoided the Mizo style. Important composers of this period included Chalhuna, Zairema and Lalsawma, although none of their songs survive in the modern hymnal. Lalpekhlua (2007: 116) describes the new way of singing as 'amalgamating English and traditional Mizo tunes.' A new sound had been produced, which also affected the way in which the familiar western hymns were sung.

But the western musical tradition that had been introduced three decades ago was far from gone. The years following the third revival saw a sharp rise in choirs. In place of the traditional all-male drinking parties, missionaries found that twice-weekly choir practices were becoming the social activity of choice (Sandy in Thanzauva, ed. 1997 75), with village choirs tackling such giants of the western canon as Handel's 'Hallelujah Chorus' and 'Worthy is the Lamb.' Under the direction of the music specialist Katie Hughes, the Mizo people soon started to gain a reputation throughout India as a talented singing people. In 1928 she brought a massed choir of 50 children to sing a selection of choruses at the meeting of the Sylhet Synod. Their performance at this event amazed the audience, including the press, and their reaction was widely documented (Lloyd 1991: 91).

### **2.3.4 The Fourth Revival: 1930**

As early as 1927 Lloyd had observed 'signs of coming revival', and the rise in choral singing as well as the increased acceptance and appreciation of Mizo compositions had reached a climax by the time the fourth revival finally arrived in 1930. This final part of the early Mizo revival movement was a complicated character, remembered both for its consolidation of the new indigenous Mizo worship characteristics, as well as the sectarian and extreme behaviour that it inspired amongst some communities.

Lorrain's descriptions of the revival show that this was the point at which *lengkhawm zai* finally appeared in much the same form in which it is experienced today. Its characteristics will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but Lorrain offers a succinct explanation of the new tune which had touched the Mizo hearts:

Today the Lushai Church is producing quite a new type of hymn, which is becoming even more popular and powerful than [the western hymns]. They are

the outpouring of Lushai hearts inspired by the Holy Spirit. *In construction they conform largely to the old Lushai songs, but the tunes, although Lushai through and through are yet something quite different from those used in the old heathen days.* The Christians love these new hymns and sing them with ecstatic fervour. I have over 200 of them written down in a book and the number is increasing all the time. I foresee the day when English and Welsh tunes and the hymns so many thousands have sung to them since the Gospel came to these Hills will be regarded as an interesting curiosity of the early Lushai Church. (Emphasis mine, Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 266)

The singing of traditional-style tunes also became a characteristic of some of the sects that emerged at this time that promoted ‘excessive liberalism’ such as sexual promiscuity and a return to the native *zu* (Kipgen 1997: 299). The Thiangzau sect<sup>44</sup> for example used traditional tunes such as *chhim phei duai*, *Mangzuali* and *Hrangchhawni zai*. The Khuangtuaha Pawl<sup>45</sup> sang the hunting songs *hlado*, and chanted three-line songs to the former Puma Zai tune, *tlanglam zai* (Lalpekhluva 2007: 146). Nunthara (1996: 102) writes that this use of local dances and tunes became associated with trance and mysticism, easily confused with the Christian revivalist experiences.

The Khuangtuaha Pawl was so averse to any western music that they pejoratively called the hymns ‘bookroom songs’ (Lalpekhluva 2007: 146). Kipgen (cited in Pachuau 2002: 102), claims that the sects emphasised a renewal of ‘Mizoness’, such that some Christians became confused about the similar behaviour and worship style experienced during the revival at this time. This partly helps to explain some of the extreme behaviour adopted by some of the revivalists. In some instances, individuals would feel called to become evangelists to other Mizo villages without the endorsement of the church or missionaries, and would often result in difficult civil disputes. McCall (1949: 151) gives an account of the case of one individual who was charged with causing a public disturbance through his evangelising. The man, who had left his own family behind and had started his ministry with a married woman, stated:

I am on tour with Zomawii, who has, it is true, a husband with whom she has left her small child. We have been called to spread the Gospel, though we are not operating with any sanction from the Pastor. There is no need for this. I am a normal man, and I have my own sanction... It is not possible for me to agree to any special wishes

<sup>44</sup> The Thiangzau Pawl continues to exist as a small charismatic sect.

<sup>45</sup> Now known as Chana Pawl after the brother of the founder Khuangtuaha. Chana was the father of the current head of the family, Ziona, and advocated polygamy. Ziona now lays claim to being the father of the largest family in the world, with 39 wives and a household of 160. See [www.deccanchronicle.com/channels/lifestyle/others/man-160-member-family-mizoram-097](http://www.deccanchronicle.com/channels/lifestyle/others/man-160-member-family-mizoram-097).

because my actions are governed by the Holy Spirit, and I must speak out that which enters within me.

The sudden rise in sexual promiscuity was largely associated with a phenomenon called *khurbing*, in which two or three individuals, of the same or different sex, would feel themselves to be drawn to each other by a deep spiritual love that was different from their other relationships with their friends or family. This could be equated to the English concept of a 'soul-mate'. Spiritual language was used for this relationship, and the *khurbing* movement claimed to be a fruit of the revival that manifested the divine love of God in its purest form between humans, yet the consequent behaviour sometimes contradicted the conventional biblical guidance that had been given such that it was one of the few revival elements to be actively discouraged by the missionaries. However Lawmsanga makes the disconcerting suggestion that it may have originated from the newly popularised *lengkhawm* tradition (2010: 156). There is a possibility that the intimacy of dancing and singing in close physical proximity to a crowd of others in the circle could have led at this time to some individuals sensing a strong spiritual bond with their fellow-worshippers.

Perhaps, after all, the first Mizo Christians can be said to be justified in their concern that allusions to traditional song and dance would lead to a permissive attitude to their former practices and beliefs. Indeed, as will be seen, it was the senior Mizo Christian leaders who continued to be especially conservative and reluctant to participate in the singing and dancing for decades after this revival. While withholding judgement, we may confirm that confusion is certainly what had happened by the time of the fourth revival. But the organic emergence of an indigenous form of Mizo worship and spirituality had already taken firm root, from the all-night singing in 1906, to the first use of the drum and dance in 1919, to the use of poetic language in 1923 and finally to the establishment of *lengkhawm* and *zaikhawm* as traditions by 1930. Attempted restrictions imposed by the Mizo church leadership over the following decade, such as the seizure of drums in Champhai and the publication of the 'Revival Manual' in 1949 seem to have had no lasting effect (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 423). Whatever rifts and divisions had appeared in the Christian population after the fourth revival, their worship would never again be the same as it had been before 1906. As the missionary Mendus reported:

The revival enthusiasm is a continual protest against lukewarm Christianity (156).  
There is a valuable mystic strain in it that should be conserved, however crude its forms may take.... (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 163)

## 2.4 Created Traditions: A Preliminary Analysis

The historical account above addresses more than one created tradition. As well as the eventual emergence of *lengkhawm*, we witness the introduction of a Mizo Christian tradition through a series of revivals, and the preservation of older songs and dances under the somewhat mythologized presentation of a traditional Mizo culture. Each of these is related to the others, and can be subjected to critical analysis from different perspectives offered by Hobsbawm and others.

As mentioned at the opening, Hobsbawm is popularly credited with creating the framework with which falsified or deceptive traditions can be unmasked. Aside from the fact that his writings actually seek to embrace the wider meanings of ‘invention’ and ‘creation’, it is possible that his reputation in this sense is, in itself, something of an invented tradition. He has been used to validate an increasingly negative and gleefully cynical approach to tradition. The papers of the NOSTER Conference of 1999 and Lewis and Hammer’s *The Invention of Sacred Tradition* (2007), are examples of this trend in the area of religious tradition. The latter seems exclusively dedicated to the revealing of the numerous instances of ‘spurious origins’ found in the history of major religious texts. Indeed, Lewis and Hammer admit as much in their introduction (Ibid: 16).

The textual weaknesses of the Christian tradition are of little relevance here; what is important is that the Christian tradition was eventually accepted by the vast majority of the Mizo people, largely because of the revivals. A complete Mizo Bible was not published until 1959, so textual criticism cannot be brought to bear on our understanding of the formation of the Mizo Christian tradition in its early stages. Crucially, the Mizo people know that the traditions which dominate their society now are, in their context, only 100 years old, so there is no misrepresentation of this account in mainstream Christianity, although perhaps an element of invention (whether intended or not) can be detected in the claims of some of the smaller sects that arose during the fourth revival, and also of some modern sects<sup>46</sup>.

Initially, as we have seen, these sects sought to promote what was perceived to be a more ‘traditional’ way of life, with more engagement with the spirit world, beer-drinking and dances. Puma Zai could also be regarded as such a movement that portrayed itself as a more

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<sup>46</sup> There is a controversial belief held by some groups that the Mizo people are direct descendants of one of the lost tribes of Israel, and that modern-day Israel is therefore their promised land. This Zionist theme is popular, and has inspired the modern Kohhran Thianghlum (Holy Church), an exclusive sect which believes Mizoram to be the land on which Solomon’s Temple will be rebuilt as a fulfilment of biblical prophecy. The sect has been actively self-fulfilling, and has nearly completed an impressive new Solomon’s Temple near Aizawl according to the biblical descriptions.

traditional alternative to the new Christianity. It is here that Harvey's contribution to Lewis and Hammer's work is of value (2007: 277-290). In his assessment of 'invented paganism', especially in Wales, he describes a similar instance of counter-Christian attempts to return to a former pagan way of life, yet highlights the problem that little was known about it so that modern paganism is probably quite different to that which it seeks to emulate. For example, Harvey comments on the heightened divide between natural and urban spaces that exists in modern Britain, such that 'nature is culturally determined' and is perceived in a more polarised way than in the past.

Thus we seek tradition in what seems obviously traditional now when compared with modernity, as if there is a dichotomy between the two. It is interesting, for example, that the early sects and certainly the Holy Church (see Footnote 46) have adopted Mizo Christian worship practices, such as *lengkhawm*. Solomon's Temple, though ostensibly Zionist, contains a large *lamtual* (dancing area) and two drums: their worship is of the Mizo Christian tradition. It reveals much about *lengkhawm* that it has found inclusion in sects which have sought to emphasise Mizo tradition. In an environment of revivals in which Christianity and its songs seemed modern and alien, the new practice of *lengkhawm* stood out as something which was traditional in its essence. To borrow from Harvey, *lengkhawm* as a tradition has been culturally determined as such by its very juxtaposition with western modernity. It is something of an irony that without Christianity, modernity, or the influence of missionaries, it is unlikely that *lengkhawm* would have emerged, and still less likely that it would have been identified to have been traditional. This contributes an important perspective to the primary question of this thesis, as we find that the extent to which *lengkhawm* is considered traditional is determined by its relationship with the modern society to which it belongs.

Further parallels with the revivals of Welsh paganism and Druidry can also be drawn in the observation that the various attempts to preserve and maintain former practices have reached a mainstream, even Christian, appeal. They represent an opportunity to construct a stronger sense of identity based on what is presented as historical tradition, the Welsh Eisteddfod being Harvey's case in point. While the actual beliefs and sacrificial practices that dominated Mizo life before Christianity are now extremely rare, organisations such as the YMA and the early activities of the sects have ensured the survival and promotion of a 'tradition' in the form of dances, significant woven cloth patterns and the celebration of festivals such as Chapchar Kut. However, on closer examination, much of this seems, to some extent, invented, in the best sense of the word.



The dances popularised are varied, and some do claim a longer heritage, yet *chheih lam* (of *tlanglam zai*) and *cheraw kan* (a complex bamboo dance) have more recent origins. We already know of *tlanglam zai*, sparked in 1907 as a counter-Christian movement, and one which seemed radical at the time yet is now presented as traditional. *Cheraw kan* is actually described as a game rather than a dance by an overwhelming number of sources, and is largely agreed to have originated amongst the Pawi (far southern) people of Mizoram. Yet numerous 'traditional' values are placed upon it according to the occasion; I variously saw it presented as a 'welcome' dance, a 'celebration' dance and a 'funeral' dance. If we believe Chapman's reports, we can also learn that the intricate weaving of cloths with different significant designs was found to be a declining tradition in the 1920's that Chapman and her colleagues actively sought to revive as a useful skill for women in their new girls' schools, ensuring their survival today. It seems that many of the modern symbols of tradition in Mizoram are actually recontextualised and redefined appropriations from the past.

It is not my purpose to ridicule the popular concept of Mizo tradition as it is presented today. After all, as Cohen states in his *Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985: 99), the 'past is a resource' with which to construct contemporary symbols within a community. The historical weakness of some Mizo symbols does not imply that their value to Mizo society is any less significant. As Hobsbawm writes in *Nations and Nationalism*, religion itself may be a weak national identifier, but it is its associated rituals and icons which can powerfully 'form' community (1992: 71-72). Mizoram's nationalist sentiment is strengthened by the dances and music associated with former beliefs, though these beliefs themselves are now obsolete. Equally, Mizoram's religious identity is found less in the Christian belief, but more in the continued practice of Mizo Christian traditions including *lengkhawm*. As Post's excellent reading of Hobsbawm shows (1999: 41-59), it is important to step beyond the question of authenticity to the role such traditions play in the establishment of identity. He recognises for example that Christian ritual is a 'dynamic cultural object', whose traditions can vary and adapt to the cultures in which they find themselves, so that 'tradition' can inform the character that Christian ritual can take. This is certainly the case in *lengkhawm*, in which a rather contrived and simplified idea of traditional Mizo music requiring the drum, a particular tune style and dancing, as first epitomised in Puma Zai, has subsequently become the defining characteristic of the Mizo Christian tradition (or ritual).

As Hobsbawm writes (1992: 123-124), it is almost always possible to belong to numerous traditions simultaneously, which can inform religious, ethnic and social identities for example. It is only when an individual or group is forced to choose between them that tension arises. As

we review the history of Christianity in Mizoram then, we find that the first few years saw very few converts. In a tribal environment which emphasised community, the isolated instances of individuals turning to Christianity were, in themselves, somewhat anomalous to the tendency of Christian conversion amongst tribal people to take place within mass movements. As Thanzauva has asserted with respect to India, 'tribal conversion has always been mass conversion' (2002: 268). Most people tolerated and even appreciated the contribution of the missionaries, their music, education and healthcare, but saw no need to choose to embrace the Christian tradition that was offered.

The confessional appeal of the first revival, however, was different. Hobsbawm himself identifies (1992: 123) the success of 'confessional' religious traditions in gaining followers. As the revival prompted a mass movement without much intervention from missionaries or local evangelists, there was a spontaneous attraction to the Christian tradition on the part of a large number of Mizo people. Yet the lifestyle taught by the missionaries seemed so incompatible with 'traditional' life that tension inevitably occurred: some rejected anything that was associated with the former life, while the Puma Zai movement of the following year represented a desire for such traditions to survive.

It is my suggestion that during the subsequent revivals the emergence of *lengkhawm* served to preclude the potentially divisive 'choice' between traditions. Pierson (2009: 184) agrees that 'most genuine renewal movements lead believers to sing... new, different music that identified with the culture more than did the older music.' *Lengkhawm* did not offer a syncretic system that was at odds with either tradition, but in its adoption of perceived 'traditional' symbols within the Christian ritual of hymn-singing, it provided a way in which the dual ethnic and religious identity could be not just balanced but integrated. The drum, the dancing, the singing and the emphasis on Mizo sentimentality can be as spuriously traditional as any scholar can detect; this is not the point. Instead, these symbols of Mizo traditional life have become embedded within a Mizo Christian tradition and embodied in a very modern tradition that goes by the name of *lengkhawm*.

In the apparent scarcity of assessments of Hobsbawm through a lens appropriate to *lengkhawm*, I have found it particularly helpful to follow his co-editor's illuminating case-studies addressing comparable situations in Zimbabwe and Zambia. Ranger, a historian, sheds light on the infamous witch-hunts of the Mwana Lesa movement in Zambia in 1925 (1975: 45-75). Though the results were devastating, the processes involved in creating and validating the purportedly Christian ritual of killing witches was strikingly similar.

The initial importance of empirical spiritual experiences resonating with indigenous understanding is cited as a factor in the acceptance of the Christian tradition offered by Tomo Nyirenda (who belonged to the millenarian Watch Tower movement). Whereas other missionaries ‘spoke many useless words’ (Ibid: 51), Nyirenda’s evangelism was supported by the detection of witches, a miraculous skill appreciated by the Lala people. Similarly, in Mizoram, it was not so much the teaching from the missionaries, but the tangible spiritual experiences of the revivals, resonating with the spirituality they already had, that led many to accept Christianity. Ranger offers a new interpretation of the tragedy, claiming that the killings that eventually followed at the request of the chiefs misrepresented the killing of witches as a highly concentrated symbol of the ‘old’ tradition, as well as a justified fulfilment of the millenarian teaching of Nyirenda which already bore strong parallels with apocalyptical beliefs of the Lala people. Although the Mizo parallel is indirect, it can be understood that the accentuation of select features of ‘old’ tradition (musically) were formative in the character that the accepted Christian tradition would take. As Ranger writes (Ibid: 53):

Tomo brought the Watch Tower message to the Lala. But the Lala brought many things with them when they responded... The Mwana Lesa movement was formed through the interaction of the two.

This can be compared with Vanlalchhuanawma’s claim cited by Lawmsanga (2010: 219) that ‘Christianity gave music to the Mizo church and the Mizo church gave life to Christianity through music.’ This chapter has sought to present an overview and analysis of how the tradition of *lengkhawm* came to be established in Mizoram. Its historical basis has been narrated, and the specific musical implications of this will form the subject of subsequent chapters. Its identity as a modern tradition has been introduced, and must remain an important concept throughout the following study, but with an awareness of its role in the consolidation of the Christian tradition within Mizo society as well as its identity as a response to modern ideas about Mizo tradition.

### 3. Singing Tradition: Melody and Voice in *Lengkhawm*

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The Mizo scholar Khiangte writes that ‘Mizos have had their own different *zai* (tune or flow)’ (2008: 303, parentheses his). This chapter analyses the singing-style and melody of *lengkhawm*, ultimately with the aim of understanding the role of voice and melody in the emergence of a tradition. What are the reasons for retaining characteristics, and what are the reasons for adopting new elements? How does the level of compatibility between musical styles affect the music that is produced from an encounter between them? This will form an important analytical contribution to the thesis as a whole, in seeking to address the way in which the musical tradition of *lengkhawm* has been shaped by Christianity while simultaneously presenting a certain element of continuity with the ‘different *zai*’ that characterised Mizo singing before the missionaries arrived.

We will examine the tune of *lengkhawm zai*: how it is constructed and how it is sung. These two aspects are embodied in a single Mizo term: *thluk*. Often translated as ‘flow’ and ‘tune’, it refers to the overall quality of the sound, as well as the individual rhythmic, melodic and structural aspects from which it is formed. These interview extracts demonstrate to some extent the use of the English word ‘tune’ to discuss the *lengkhawm thluk*.

Missionaries had translated western hymns but they didn’t touch the Mizo sentiment as much as the Mizo tune did. (David F Lalkhawngaiha<sup>47</sup>)

Even when they played with guitar, keyboard, and all these kinds of instruments also, this tune is very Mizo. (Lalmuanawma Renthlei<sup>48</sup>)

That is the *lengkhawm zai*. And the tune is it’s not high and it’s not low, it’s like in the middle. (Michael VL Rema<sup>49</sup>)

Even now, some songs, the tunes, some tunes are a bit soft.... So even the tune of the spiritual singing is different. (Elless Hruaita<sup>50</sup>)

So we are lonely people, we love singing, and then I think we prefer the soft tune, so that’s how we sang. (K Thanzauva<sup>51</sup>)

Lalrinsanga offers a rare musical analysis in his ‘Theological Interpretation of *Lengkhawm Zai*’ (2011). He summarises the situation thus:

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<sup>47</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> March 2012

<sup>48</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012

<sup>49</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012

<sup>50</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012

<sup>51</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012

The Mizos were used to low pitched song with a smooth flowing melody and gentle bending of notes... The result was the birth of the indigenous tune. The sharp pitch notes were smoothened and a gentle flow was put to the western tunes, which later came to be known as *Lengkhawm Zai*. (2011: 22)

Chapter 2 demonstrated that the Mizo people had a rich song tradition long before the missionaries arrived. Some of those tunes still form a part of cultural displays and dances. The missionaries started to introduce songs with an altogether different tune as early as 1894, and these became extremely popular amongst Christian and non-Christian Mizo people alike. It was only at the time of the third revival in the early 1920's that a new way of singing started to emerge; a path through which to sing the western hymns that seemed more natural, and was reminiscent of the traditional tunes. Eventually, by the fourth revival in 1930, the style of *lengkhawm zai* had been established and Mizo songs were being composed to this new *thluk*. This chapter sets out to articulate the musical characteristics of this *thluk* from a sample of *lengkhawm* songs, both those that have been composed in the style, and those that have been modified by performance practice. For the purposes of clarity, the former will be called '*lengkhawm zai*' in this chapter, and the latter will be called '*sol-fa zai*', even though in practice these are also sung in the *lengkhawm* style. *Sol-fa zai* is a term that is usually applied to songs in the hymnal that are printed in four parts of tonic sol-fa, as in Figure 4.

It must be acknowledged that this study bears obvious methodological relation to the 'folklore' studies of our European predecessors such as Bartók and Hornbostel, especially in its emphasis on what could be understood in terms of an archetypal melodic tune. With careful consideration of Brăiloiu's concerns about such studies (1984), I am compelled to clarify that this does not represent a search for a tune which belongs only to the Mizo people and which can be traced back to their very origins. Far from it, this study gladly acknowledges the relationship that the *thluk* will have not only with the songs that were sung before Christianity, but also inevitably with the encounters that have taken place with a rich hymn tradition introduced by the Welsh, the English and by the American gospel repertoire. All of these traditions in themselves are the fruit of other inter-cultural encounters. Even to a Mizo understanding, it is not the Mizo parentage of a song which will touch their sentiment, but the tune itself, whatever its origin. Take the following assertion from a church musician, Lalmuanawma:

Sometimes, when we see or when we heard someone singing, if he or she is American also, British also, Indian, Vai<sup>52</sup> people also. If they sing a song which is

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<sup>52</sup> A non-derogatory term referring to the people of the 'plains' of India and Bangladesh.

very resemblance, which is very like Mizo tune, we will say 'this is very Mizo!' If it's sung by other people also, 'this sounds like, this sound seems like Mizo song' we will say again.... So for example if Carrie Underwood sings a song which is solemn, very soft, nice country music, so if we take that song and translate it into Mizo, then we will not know whether this is translation. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Similarly, in an echo of Nettl's theories of compatibility, Vanlalchhuanawma acknowledges that 'Puma Zai which was gradually developing into various types of *tlanglam zai* had grown more compatible with the western Christian tunes' (2006: 296). This demonstrates an awareness that *lengkhawm zai*, and even its cited predecessor, *tlanglam zai*, are not to be considered as wholly or indigenously separate from the western music context out of which they developed.

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John Newton 1725-1807      AUSTRIA      F. Joseph Haydn 1732-1809  
Doh is F.    *Thlûk 1*      Sam 87:3

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} d : - . r   m : r \\ d : - . d   d : t_1 \\ m : - . f   s : s \\ d : - . d   d : s_1 \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f : m   \underline{r . t} : d \\ r : d   \underline{t_1 . s_1} : s_1 \\ s : s   f : m \\ t_1 : d   s_1 : d \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} l : s   f : m \\ l_1 : \underline{d . s_1}   t_1 : d \\ f : s   s : s \\ f : m   r : d \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} r : \underline{m . d}   s : - \\ d : d   t_1 : - \\ l : l   r : - \\ f_1 : \underline{f_1}   s_1 : - \end{array} \right.$
$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} d : - . r   m : r \\ s_1 : - . s_1   s_1 : t_1 \\ d : - . t_1   d : s \\ m_1 : - . s_1   d : s_1 \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f : m   \underline{r . t} : d \\ \underline{l . s_1} : s_1   s_1 : s_1 \\ \underline{d . r} : m   f : m \\ \underline{l . t} : d   s_1 : d \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} l : s   f : m \\ l_1 : d   r : d \\ d : m   s : s \\ f_1 : d   t_1 : d \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} r : \underline{m . d}   s : - \\ d : d   t_1 : - \\ l : l   r : - \\ f_1 : \underline{f_1}   s_1 : - \end{array} \right.$
$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} r : m   \underline{r . t} : s_1 \\ s_1 : s_1   s_1 : s_1 \\ t_1 : d   t_1 : t_1 \\ s_1 : s_1   s_1 : s_1 \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} f : m   \underline{r . t} : s_1 \\ s_1 : s_1   s_1 : s_1 \\ r : d   t_1 : t_1 \\ t_1 : d   s_1 : \underline{s_1 . f_1} \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} s : f   m : - . m   \underline{f_1 . s_1} : l_1 \\ s_1 : \underline{l_1 . t_1}   d : - . d \\ m : r   d : - . l \\ m_1 : \underline{f_1 . s_1}   l_1 : - . l_1 \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \underline{f_1} : - . \underline{f_1}   s : - \\ r : - . d   t_1 : - \\ l : - . l   s : - \\ r : - . r   s_1 : - \end{array} \right.$
$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} d' : - . t   l : s \\ d : - . d   d : d \\ s : - . s   f : s \\ m : - . m   f : m \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} l : - . s   \underline{s . f} : m \\ d : - . d   t_1 : d \\ f : - . s   s : s \\ f : - . m   r : d \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} r : \underline{m . f}   \underline{s . l} : \underline{f . r} \\ t_1 : t_1   d : l_1 \\ s : s   d : \underline{d . r} \\ s_1 : f_1   m_1 : f_1 \end{array} \right.$	$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} d : \underline{m . r}   d : - \\ s_1 : t_1   d : - \\ m : f   m : - \\ s_1 : s_1   d : - \end{array} \right.$

d<sub>1</sub>

**Figure 4:** 'Nangma Thil Ropuite An Sawi', printed in four parts of tonic sol-fa in KHB (2005). This is a translation of 'Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken.' See *Thlûk 1* in the top-left corner. A second tune is printed below, and the words are on the facing page.

### 3.1 The *Thlûk* in Lengkhawm Zai

Though not chronological as such, it seems most helpful to begin with an analysis of the tune in its most concentrated form, in the songs that were specifically composed in the style from the time of the third and fourth revivals. Once these definitive examples from the genre have

been studied, an extension to the elements of the tune that appear in modified western and Mizo *sol-fa zai* can lead to some tentative suggestions about the tune's roots both in traditional Mizo music as well as its emergence from the western hymn tradition.

During my six months in Mizoram I encountered ten songs written specifically for the *lengkhawm zai* genre, notated as just one unharmonised part and not modified as much as the western hymns (see Appendix B for the list of songs). Most of these were Christmas songs so I experienced the same songs sung in multiple different churches during the Christmas season at church services as well as at their Christmas *zaikhawm* (see Chapter 5). Four of these songs are included on the DVD and their initial transcriptions into conventional western staff notation can be found in Appendix E. Most of the examples in this chapter will be derived from these four songs, which are as follows:

Mal Min Sawm Turin (composed by Patea)

Hlimna Ni Ropui Chu A Eng (Kamlala)

Eden Par Mawi (Taisena)

Van Hmun Ropui Pelin (Denghlira)

All musical examples in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, display a transcription from congregational singing on the top stave and a staff notation transcription of the original *sol-fa* notation on the bottom stave, so that the performed and notated versions can be compared.

### 3.1.1 Meter

The constant beating of the *khuangpui* (large drum) and the subdivisions of the *khuangte* (small drum) can mislead a listener into believing the songs to be metrically rigorous. Indeed this is not the case. As explained in Chapter 5, the function of the drums is mainly metronomic, meaning that they dictate the tempo and its gradual increase, but do not indicate the song's meter. Without the singing, it would not be possible to identify the meter purely from listening to the drums; even the supplementary instruments such as the keyboard and guitar are ambiguous in this respect. As described in the fifth chapter, the guitar and keyboard tend to follow a duple rhythm of alternation. Likewise, the feet of the dancers will keep stepping left-right alternately, implying a constant duple meter that is clearly contradicted when we actually examine the songs.

This is partly because the metrical organisation of beats into repeated groups of equal length is quite alien to the Mizo music context, and is associated with the western hymnal music epitomised in the *sol-fa zai*. In the hymnals the *lengkhawm zai* is printed in bars of equal

length in both the sol-fa and staff notation editions, with a fermata sporadically printed at the end of some (but not all) phrases. In the staff notation a time signature is given, but this will not change even when the music clearly changes, whether in practice or even on the printed page. Example 1 illustrates this in the staff notation taken from the *Pathian Fakna Hla Bu*. ‘Ram Thianghlma’ begins in 6/8 but becomes 9/8 at the chorus (‘Aw, Bethlehem...’), even though no change in time signature is given.

zêl - in, Lal pianna hmun tlâwm Bethlehem min thlen ang.  
 piang ta, Lei hi cha - tuan hla mawiin nghar vêl rawh se.  
 zêl a, A pian-na Be - thle - hem tlâng a rawn thlen ta.  
 hnêm-tu, Hmun khawharah pawh aman min awmpui ang.  
 Thunawn

Aw, Bethlehem tlâng ka thlen hma chuan, châwl lovin ka kal

Example 1: ‘Ram Thianghlma’: Transition to 9/8 chorus as printed in *Pathian Fakna Hla Bu* (2009)

When transcribing the recordings of the songs, I had to choose whether to impose appropriate time signatures according to my perception of the music, or to follow the sometimes misleading time signatures printed in the hymnals. Brăiloiu’s advocacy of avoiding metrical transcription altogether of unmetered songs is well-advised (1984), but in this context it seems that it is actually possible to learn more about the metrical conception by attempting to follow the sometimes incongruous attempts to add meter to the songs in the notated hymnals. The compromise I chose was to make sure the first and last beat of each bar matched the first and last beat of each bar printed in the hymnal, but to adjust the time signature depending on the number of beats the recorded version actually contained within each bar. I believe this maintains the integrity of the original notation but reveals the actual metrical complexity of the songs that is not so apparent in the hymnals. So in the above example I insert a 9/8 time signature as the chorus begins, even in my staff notation transcription of the printed sol-fa.

Even the differences between 6/8 and 2/4 and other compound meters are blurred in *lengkhawm zai*. Often the hymns are notated in compound meter, such as ‘Lal Pian Hun Lawmawm’ and ‘Van Hmun Ropui Pelin.’ The original sol-fa is more open-ended, as no time signature is given, so that the three notes in each beat can be interpreted either as triplets or as compound meter. In practice the drums will never deviate from duple subdivisions, such that three notes in one beat can only ever have the effect of a triplet, and will not be perceived



as fundamental to the meter. This tension can be resolved by a congregation in two ways. Firstly, they might shift towards a dotted or duple rhythm that matches the drums better, as in 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin', which is included on the DVD:

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the song 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin'. Each system consists of an upper staff (treble clef) and a lower staff (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first system has a 3/4 time signature and the lyrics 'Van hmun ro - pui pel - in, A lo kal \_\_\_\_\_ sual - na kar -'. The second system has a 4/4 time signature and the lyrics 'ah \_\_\_\_\_ Khaw - vel hre - hawm a tuar a ni Aw ka'. The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines.

Example 2: 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin', opening bars (as in subsequent examples, the upper staff is as performed, and the lower staff is as notated).

Alternatively, they might persist in the original rhythm, creating a strong sense of triplets. More commonly, the song will contain a combination of the two, as in this opening phrase from 'Ram Thianghlima':

The image shows musical notation for the opening bars of 'Ram Thianghlima'. It consists of an upper staff (treble clef) and a lower staff (bass clef). The lyrics are 'Ram thiang-hlim-a Lal lo piang chu, Chung lam ar-si chuan a pan zel a;'. The notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines, with some notes grouped by brackets and the number '2' above them, indicating a duple rhythm.

Example 3: 'Ram Thianghlima', opening bars

In my transcriptions I have retained the compound signature where the rhythm is mostly retained, but have changed it to a duple signature if the dotted variation is more prevalent. This might suggest that the composition of *lengkhawm* songs has been influenced to a certain extent by the rhythms of many of the Sankey hymns which have a tendency to employ more triplets and dotted rhythms, yet this has not extended as far as the beat of the drum which has proved to be fundamentally resistant to such change. Despite the fact that the nature, usage and rhythm of this drum does not have as clear a precedent in Mizo traditional music as might be assumed (this is highlighted in Chapter 5), it has become the factor that is most resistant to the metrical and rhythmic features of western hymns to which the melodies on the other hand have sometimes adapted.

Of greater significance is the way in which the sung examples deviate from the printed version in such a way as to further disrupt the meter. This is often but not always a natural

consequence of the extended final notes of phrases which are sometimes indicated by a fermata. The common prolonging of these notes is one of the reasons why transcription of the recordings was so necessary rather than a dependence on the hymnals for analysis. Indeed, as Appendix E shows, the recorded examples from the different churches bear much stronger relationship to each other than to the printed version. It is important to recognise this difference between how the songs are sung in practice and how they have been notated. One example of this extension happening mid-phrase is in the song ‘Hlimna Ni Ropui’, in which all the churches I visited added a beat to the fourth note, such that the first two bars have had to be transcribed in 5/4 (One recording is included on the DVD). With all the churches following the same rhythm, it is clear that the additional beat is not an anomaly or a mistake, but is instead the accepted tune of the song.



Example 4: ‘Hlimna Ni Ropui’, opening bars

With such discrepancies to resolve, the transcriptions in Appendix E are riddled with time signature changes, but this cannot really be identified as a determining characteristic of *lengkhawm zai* because meter does not seem to be an important part of the way Mizo singers perceive the music; it is more of a problem for the ethnomusicologist’s attempt to accurately represent the songs in staff notation.

This deviation from the printed notation is not an uncommon phenomenon, and many music traditions including those in the West have come to acknowledge that the notated work far from represents the definitive or authoritative identity of a piece. A relevant parallel has been studied by Wicks, who analyses the ‘old style’ of singing of Primitive Baptist *Sacred Harp* singers in Alabama, Texas and Kentucky (1989: 66). She observes that whereas *Sacred Harp* singing was supposed to impose a strict, regular and harmonised style of hymn-singing based on reading the notation, many singers continue to (often unconsciously) ‘negotiate their written parts in old-way style’<sup>53</sup>. It seems that where a distinctive vocal and melodic style exists, and even where a new style has been studied and learnt, the ‘old-style’ is likely to persist or be favoured. It is probable that this is what took place in Mizoram, that *sol-fa* was

<sup>53</sup> The parallel with Mizo singing continues, as she goes on to identify this style as ‘snaking the voice’, involving ‘long portamentos’, ‘ambiguous’ thirds and the erosion of a ‘sense of diatonic tonality’ (1989: 67).

learnt, as well as the western hymns, but eventually even the reading of the hymnals became secondary to their more instinctive style of singing.

### 3.1.2 Structure

The phrase lengths of the *lengkhawm thluk* are very irregular, and in most cases this is exacerbated by the additional beats described above. All the songs are in strophic form, with several verses separated by a chorus (in Mizo, *thunawn*) or a refrain-like conclusion to each verse. Two examples suffice to illustrate this. ‘Van Hmun Ropui Pelin’ is structured with 6 + 7 + 6 + 8 beats in the verse followed by 8 + 6 beats in the refrain. In its notated form (which features no fermatas), it has 5 + 6 + 6 + 7 followed by 8 + 4 beats. ‘Mal Min Sawm Turin’ is sung with 6 + 7 + 8 + 8 followed with 8 + 6 + 9 + 8 beats, compared with the notated 6 + 5 + 7 + 8 beats followed by 8 + 6 + 9 + 8. Transcriptions of these two songs can be found in Appendix E and both are included on the DVD.

The contrast with the familiar phrase patterns of western hymns is immediately apparent; the *lengkhawm thluk* is evidently characterised by irregular phrases. Upon closer examination we are faced with the problem that the relationship between the songs themselves is much less clear. They do not seem to share one rule which unites all the songs, apart from the general principle of irregularity, but there are some patterns which can be identified in some of them. Most of the songs contain four phrases in the verse, and the *thunawn* will contain the same number or less compared with the verse it belongs to. Where there are four phrases, they can usually be related to each other in pairs following an antecedent-consequent scheme. The final tones of these phrases also support a relationship to this concept tonally, with  $\hat{5}$  and  $\hat{2}$  often ending the antecedent, indicating a dominant harmony, and  $\hat{1}$  closing the consequent. In contrast to western hymnody,  $\hat{3}$  rarely ends a phrase, a fact that will become important later in this analysis.

As an example, consider ‘Eden Par Mawi’, which suspends the tonic phrase final until the very end of both the verse and the chorus:

Verse phrase finals:  $\hat{5}$  -  $\hat{2}$  -  $\hat{5}$  -  $\hat{1}$

Chorus phrase finals:  $\hat{5}$  -  $\hat{2}$  -  $\hat{5}$  -  $\hat{1}$

The discussion above has assumed that the phrases can easily be divided. However, there are sometimes moments of ambiguity as to where a phrase starts and finishes, especially at the transition between the verse and the chorus. This is one reason why the western system of

metrical hymn classification, with its preoccupation with the syllabic meter of the poetical text<sup>54</sup>, cannot be applied to the Mizo context.

Ambiguity at the beginning and ends of phrases is sometimes true of western hymns, in which the ‘hymnal pause’ or extra half-bar before the beginning of the verse and chorus could result in erroneous interpretations about asymmetrical phrases. The additional long notes at the ends of phrases could have been given the same explanation in the Mizo context but the consistency with which they were applied across multiple congregations led me to include the beats as part of the phrases. The additional beats also occur in the middle of phrases and verses, indicating that they have a more entrenched role in characterising the tune than the functional pauses of western hymn-singing. But an interesting feature of the Mizo *thunawn* is that they often contain the word *Aw*, an affirmative interjection loosely meaning ‘Oh’ or the archaic ‘Yea’ in this context<sup>55</sup>. Matching the heartfelt quality of its spoken usage, it is often given a loose but expressive part of the melody:



Example 5: ‘Hosana ti zelin aw’ (chorus) and ‘Van Hmun Ropui Pelin’ (leading to refrain)

This is exacerbated in the sung examples, and familiarity with the songs does not diminish the unique sound of the word *Aw* in any song. The prolonged and flexible musical setting of the monosyllable, often notated with a fermata and sung with additional beats, gives it a special expressiveness, quite distinct from the rest of the tune. This is one poetic feature that can definitely be associated with some of the traditional songs that pre-date Christianity in Mizoram. The colonialist Shakespear (1909: 376) documented the text of an example of *sakhua*

<sup>54</sup> Western hymn texts and tunes have historically been classified by meter, based on the number of syllables in each line rather on the number of musical beats. This has enabled a flexibility in choosing tunes for texts and has become an important research tool in western hymnology. However, the system has not been integrated into Mizoram, possibly for the reasons described above.

<sup>55</sup> Pronounced as an open back rounded vowel: **ɔ̄**. In everyday language *aw* means ‘yes’. Another meaning of *aw* is ‘voice’.



A similar but longer feature is the phrase ‘Haleluia Amen’, a device common in both English-language and Mizo hymns, but given a similar expressive significance to *Aw* in *lengkhawm zai*. It is a frequently-uttered phrase during church services and especially by people who are dancing or praying aloud during *lengkhawm*, so its inclusion within a song text can be understood to be a device to allow individuals to give voice to this utterance as part of a wider congregation. Spontaneous vocalisations are a common feature of many Christian traditions; Titon describes the ‘Halleluia’ uttered in his Appalachian Baptist congregation as a ‘Spirit-inspired blessing’ (1987: 356). Clements in his study of American ‘folk religion’ associates them with the importance of ‘emotionalism’ (1978: 172), perhaps demonstrating an American equivalent with the notion of ‘sentimentality’ so important to Mizo worship. ‘Mal Min Sawm Turin’ and ‘Hlimna Ni Ropui’ are important examples from the current sample, the former being melodically quite distinct from the rest of the tune, such that it sounds similar to the spontaneous outbursts heard in church:

10

a lo kal \_\_\_\_\_ Fak r'u, Ha-le-lu-i-a! A-men,

12

Ha-le-lu-i-a! \_\_\_\_\_ Min tlan tur-in a lo kal. \_\_\_\_\_

Example 6: ‘Mal Min Sawm Turin’, closing bars

### 3.1.3 Contour

Nettl proposes that change depends on native priorities (1963: 356); in this sense the way in which a new style of music is accepted is not possible to predict without understanding which aspects of the ‘native’ music are the most important, and which might be more open to change. These might be different from western expectations, as we have already observed in the way in which western rhythms have been integrated into some examples of *lengkhawm zai*, but never in the accompanying drum rhythm. However, despite this problem, Poladian

has suggested a general principle that contour is often one of the ‘priorities’ that is less likely to submit to change in a folk tradition.

Contour has been one of the most commonly-studied features in folksong analysis. According to Poladian (1951: 33), even the Ravenscroft Collection of folksong of 1621 shows that ‘melodic contour is the most significant characteristic in determining national origin.’ He claims that the collection shows considerable unity of contour within songs of the same origin. This is partly because new tunes in the same area have often been built as composites of pre-existing phrases. This is certainly true of the American revival context of the early nineteenth-century in which Jackson (1975) records that rather than complete new hymns, hundreds of rhyming couplets were composed and applied often extemporaneously in the formation of songs at camp-meetings. As a result, the songs that survived and later entered the blues and country repertoires demonstrate closely-related melodic contours based on some of these early couplet refrains.

Titon’s analysis of blues music contour is exemplary, and he uses Alan Kagan’s scheme as his own basis (1977: 159-163), which seems to be a simplified variation of earlier methodologies emphasising structural rather than adjacent pitches (see Kolinski 1965 and Adams 1976). The method involves analysing a section based on the relative height (in pitch) of the first, last, highest and lowest pitches. The possible contours are given designations within the general classifications of I (generally descending), II (generally ascending) and III (generally level). In *Powerhouse for God* (1988) he states that this methodology was not appropriate for the more varied genre of the church hymns, however I have attempted to apply the approach to *lengkhawm zai*, aware that contour is audibly one of the most consistent features of the tune. More mathematical procedures have been experimented with and evaluated by Schmuckler (1999) and Quinn (1999) but the songs addressed here do not seem sufficiently complex to warrant such analysis. Their methods have primarily been developed to provide an analytical framework for melodies in which pitch class plays a weaker role in facilitating melodic memory and comparison, such as in twelve-tone and serial composition. The melodies being addressed here, by contrast, use a small range of easily recognised, highly functional and structurally significant pitches, as the following section will illustrate. Following Titon’s model, I conducted this analysis at different levels of detail, from the separate phrases, to the entire verse and entire chorus, to the song as a whole. However, the results, like the phrase analysis, revealed a surprising correlation with the western hymns. Nevertheless the most common contours for the original *lengkhawm zai* currently under analysis were as follows:

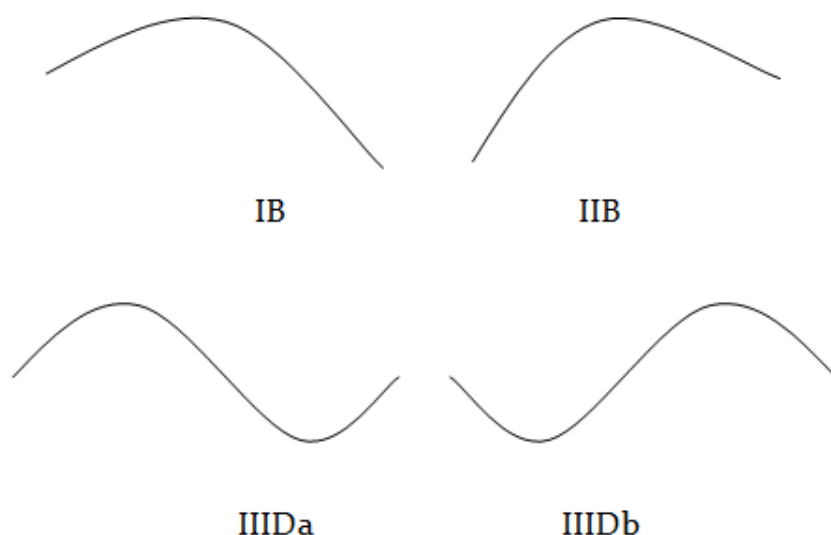


Figure 7: Main contour shapes in *lengkhawm zai* (from Titon 1994)

IB is a generally descending contour whose highest note comes between the first and last notes. The same is true of IIB which is a generally ascending contour. IIID is a generally level contour with the highest and lowest notes appearing between the first and last notes. (a) and (b) indicate the order in which these peaks and troughs appear.

*Each Phrase:* IIB + IIB // IIB (or IIIDa) + IB (or IIB)

*Verse/Chorus:* IIB // IB (or IIB or IIIDb)

*Complete Song:* IIB (or IIIDb)

On first examination this seems to be a varied form of the contour that most typified the English and Mizo *sol-fa zai* that I also analysed:

*Each Phrase:* IIB + IIB // IIB + IB

*Verse/Chorus:* IIB // IB

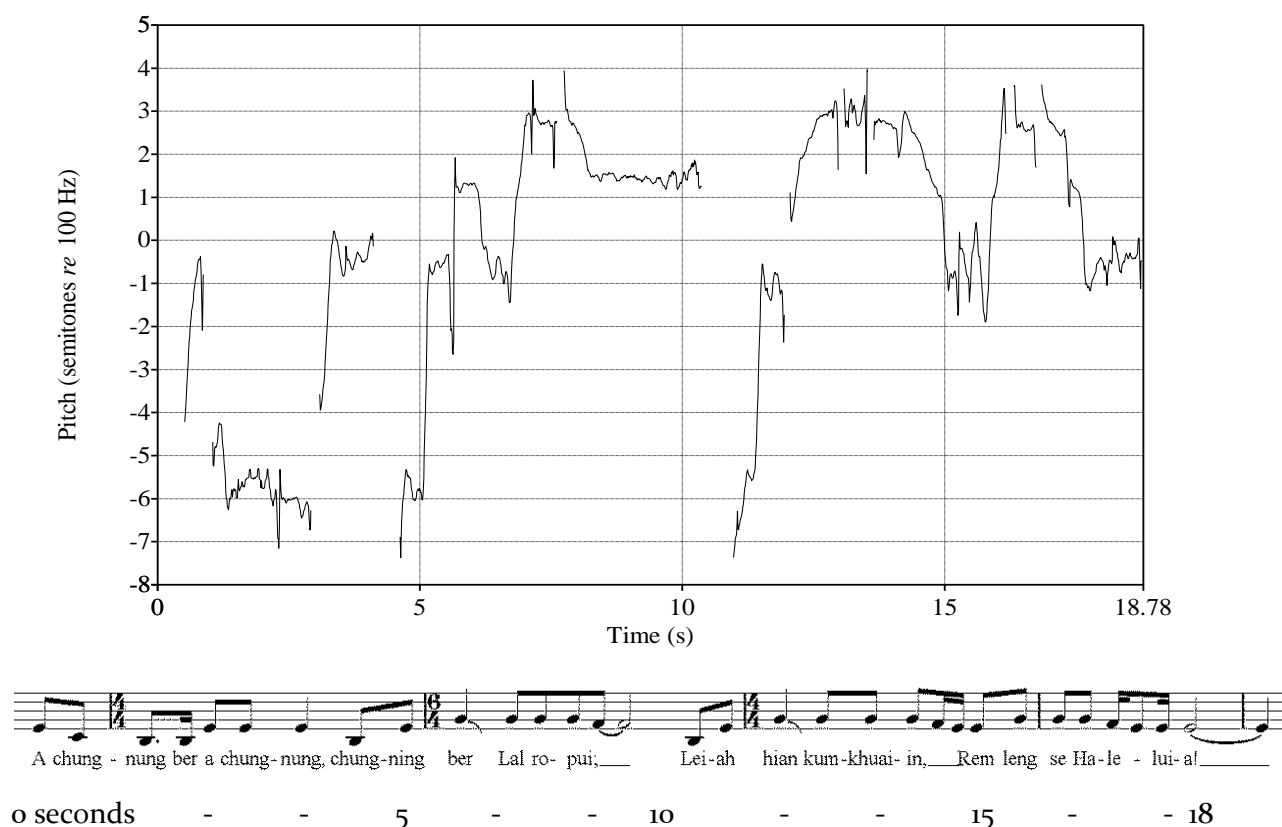
*Complete Song:* IIB

In both cases, IIB dominates the contour at all levels of analysis, with IB also dominating the *thunawn* sections. However, a recognition of some of the characteristic melodic features can indicate how this method of analysis might have been skewed. For example, the transcriptions show a common tendency of the melodies to begin on the dominant tone below the tonic, often as an anacrusis or at least performing an anacrustic melodic function. This feature is all the more apparent when the graphic contours generated through Praat are examined. Originally designed for linguistic analysis of speech, the Praat software has gained increasing



popularity amongst musicologists. It is unusually successful at identifying the tune from background noise and welcomes manual editing wherever the automatic rendition of the file has erred<sup>57</sup>.

Recognising that only solo recordings, especially without drum and guitar, would be suitable for such analysis, I made some solo recordings of Christmas *lengkhawm zai* for this purpose, as well as extracting any short sung extracts which formed a part of the interviews. Using Praat, it was possible to transpose each extract to a common 'tonal centre' of 100 Hz, from which two analyses were generated for each recording: a detailed image of the melodic contour, plotting time against frequency, calibrated to semitones for ease of comprehension; and a histogram of the pitches contained in the recording, illustrating the frequency distribution of each pitch<sup>58</sup>.



Example 7: 'Hlimna Ni Ropui' (chorus), graph shows contour; notation with time-scale is given below

The contour above shows this occurring not just when the pitch forms a part of the melody, but also as an almost indiscernible vocal 'pick-up' before the first note of a phrase. This shows that the first pitch is not necessarily sung as a consistent dominant tone, but serves as an

<sup>57</sup> Praat displays all the pitches including their perceived harmonics, but highlights only those which it considers to be part of the recorded tune. Occasionally Praat will incorrectly identify pitches amongst the upper or lower harmonics to form the tune, but this can be corrected very easily.

<sup>58</sup> This methodology was obtained through study of the online *Praat Manual for Musicologists* (5.1.20), Wim van der Meer, 2009: [www.musicology.nl/Musicology/PRAAT.html](http://www.musicology.nl/Musicology/PRAAT.html).

ambiguous and variable anacrusis. Poladian found such a situation to be the case in his own studies (1942: 204), asserting that there is a tendency in folksongs for the initial interval to be highly variable, especially in the first stanza and at anacrustic moments. He confirms that the initial pitch may most commonly be  $\hat{3}$  or  $\hat{5}$  but that the contour itself of a rapid leap to the second note is rarely altered. Example 7 displays the sung contour as performed by a soloist alongside its transcription in staff notation. It is quite clear when matching the graph to the notation that the B natural (at circa -7 semitones) does begin six semitones below the E natural (c. -1 semitone), but the range is actually greater with the E lying slightly higher than -1, and the B lying slightly lower. Furthermore, it is not sustained, the leap forming a quite striking line in both cases that leads directly up to the E. Even the E at about 4 seconds contains a similar vocal glide quite distinct from the B that belongs to the previous melodic cell.

Thus this low opening tone of phrases, though commonly part of the composed tune, can be better understood to be derived from a traditional singing style, although it must be remembered that the recordings I have used have been taken recently and do not necessarily reflect how they sounded at the time of *lengkhawm's* emergence. However, it is perhaps the case that the second note of some phrases and tunes should have been used as the first pitch in the above contour analysis, an approach which would certainly give significantly different results.

Another feature of the vocal style which may have had a similar effect is the treatment of the third degree. This will be discussed in greater depth below, but the transcriptions themselves betray the difficulty that was sometimes encountered when trying to identify the third degree as a falling note indicated by a descending slur, or as part of a falling motif clearly passing through the second to the first degree (see Example 8). However it is interpreted, the third can almost always be heard to fall, and is very rarely stated at a steady pitch. Thus, when conducting the contour analysis previously I needed to employ certain discretion when deciding whether a third was to be treated as a third or as the first degree to which it would fall when sung.



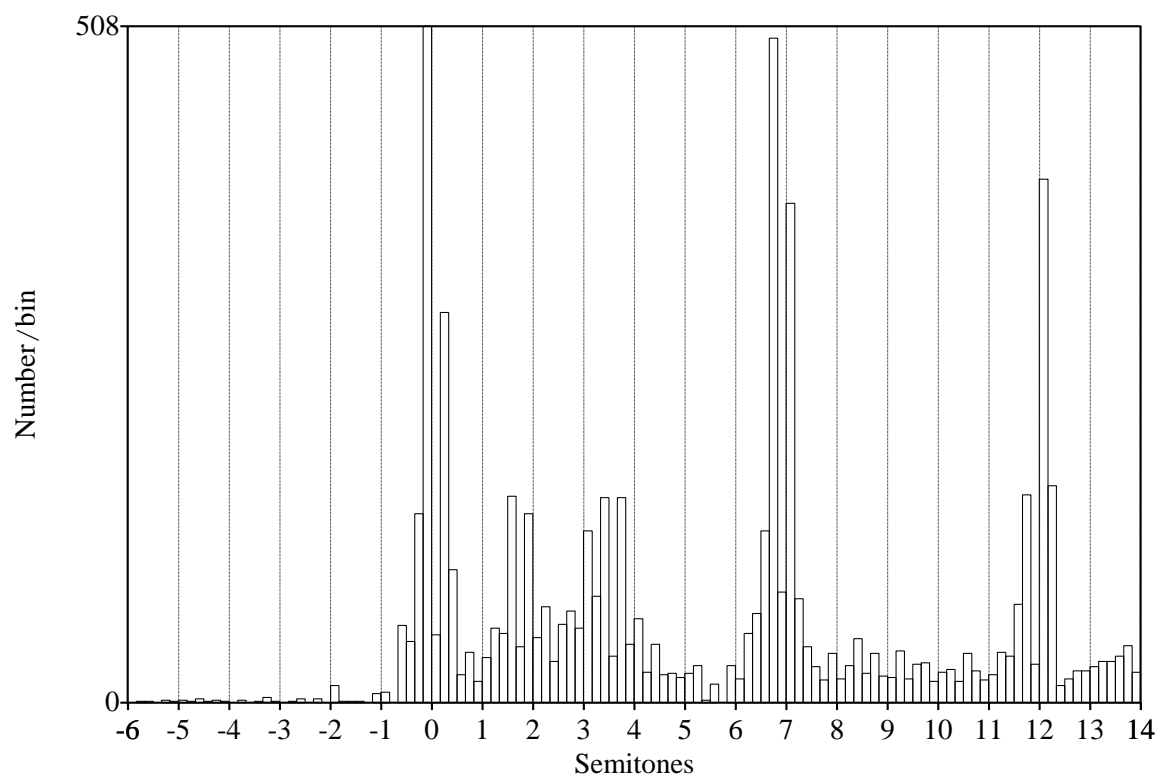
**Example 8:** Different transcriptions of the falling third in a single bar of ‘Van Hmun Ropui Pelin.’

Perhaps these difficulties support Titon's concern that the methodology is not suitable for hymn analysis, but having conducted the study we can more legitimately conclude that the overall contours of *lengkhawm zai* are both reasonably consistent, but also not obviously unlike those of western hymns. Perhaps the contour of western hymns was already quite compatible with those of traditional songs, so that the similarity has enabled a deeper connection to be established due to 'aptness' (Toynbee 2011: 74). Nettle agrees that change is more likely if there is sufficient closeness in style (2005: 108), and the area of contour may have been one of the factors that contributed to the sense of 'compatibility' that led to the changes in other aspects, such as pitch (below). If Poladian is correct that melodic contour tends to be the most resistant to change, then we must accept the likelihood that the similarity between the contours of western hymns and *lengkhawm zai* does not indicate that significant change has taken place, but that the western hymns already demonstrated a high level of compatibility with the traditional contours. However, it has also become clear that vocal style, especially the manner of opening phrases and singing the third degree, are perhaps of greater significance in understanding contour than they are in western hymn-singing.

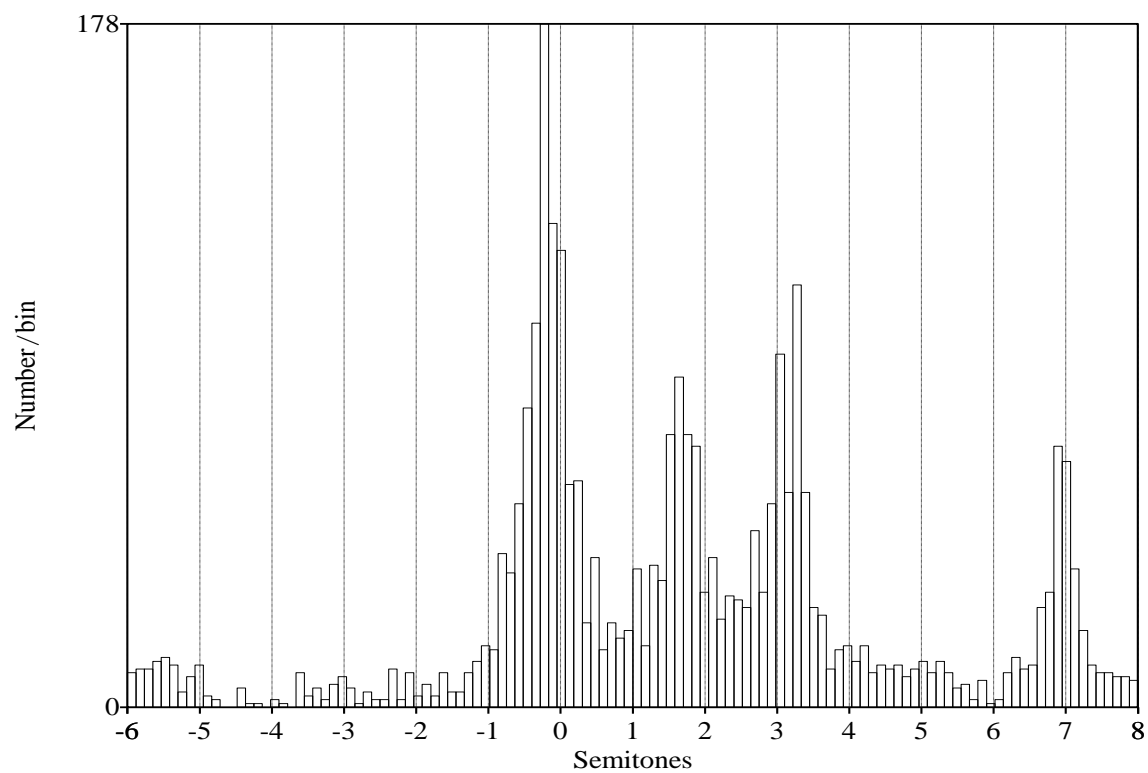
### 3.1.4 Pitch

The limitations of staff notation in melodic transcription and analysis have long been acknowledged, and in the Mizo context it is certainly advantageous to explore new tools for pitch analysis in order to gain a clearer picture of the melodic features which seem to demonstrate unstable pitches or pitches which tend to behave in a particular way in relation to others, such as those introduced above.

This pitch analysis obtained through Praat demonstrates more than the contour and precise pitches used. It also serves to provide the pitch gamut for each song, the key pitches of each, and also reveals the omitted pitches. The most common pitches are  $\hat{1}$ ,  $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{5}$ . The second degree is rarely used except between  $\hat{3}$  and  $\hat{1}$ . The sixth degree occasionally appears as an inflection within a prolonged fifth. The range of pitches can therefore be described as anhemitonic pentatonic, with an almost total exclusion of the fourth and seventh degrees, although the functions of the five pitches are quite rigorously consistent so that the melodies are dominated by the first, third and fifth degrees.



**Figure 8:** 'Mal Min Sawm Turin' histogram, showing frequency distribution of semitones (As with subsequent graphs, 0 semitones = the tonal centre transposed to 100 Hz. Bin size = 120)



**Figure 9:** 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin'

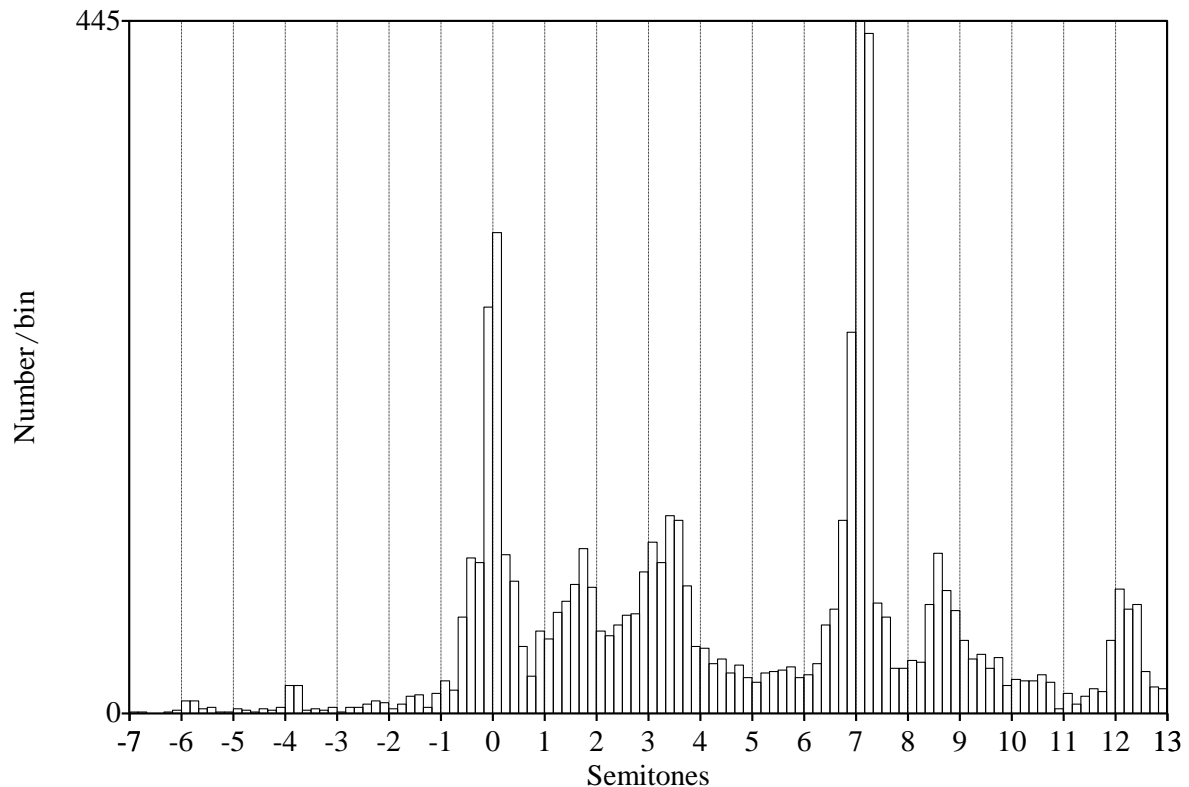


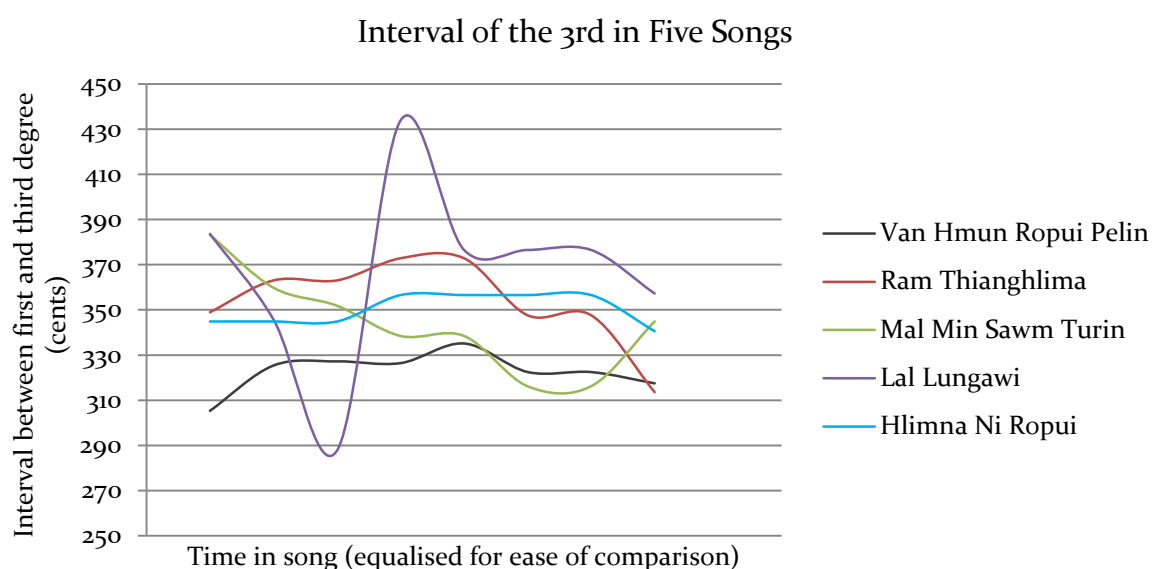
Figure 10: 'Ram Thianghlina'

While the first two graphs only really indicate four main pitches because of the scarcity of the sixth degree, the latter graph clearly highlights the pentatonic nature of the Mizo tune, with five peaks (plus the octave), but with a very heavy emphasis on the first and fifth scale degrees. The low peak of the third degree may be surprising, but it must be remembered that this pitch is not consistently sung, and is characterised both by a fluctuating frequency as well as a tendency to descend. The first and fifth degrees by contrast are more consistent and secure, hence their higher peaks. Titon (1988: 354) also observes that the Primitive Baptist style of singing transforms the diatonicism of the hymnal to a pentatonicism (losing the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> much like the Mizo tune), and that singing is mostly monophonic apart from inner fifths formed by an occasional bass line that resembles the Shape Note style. Lawmsanga cites Lalthangliana (1991: 168) in describing the 'new [*lengkhawm*] tune' as not as 'high/sharp' as the western tune, and having a 'pleasant flow' (2010: 170). This is a revealing observation, illustrating the Mizo perception of western music as 'high/sharp', while western ears have perceived the Mizo tune to be low and flat. This is particularly due to the nature of the third degree, a recent analysis of which has been provided by Lalrinsanga:

There is a unique feature of the *Lengkhawm Zai* that it uses notes of a scale interval smaller than a semi-tone. The most common being the note between the third and fourth note. For instance, in the key of E, the indigenous note would be the note

between G and G#, thus making it distinctly indigenous in comparison to its proximity to western hymn style of music. (2011: 23)

It is difficult to accurately represent the nature of the third degree in the notated transcriptions. As Lalrinsanga has observed, it lies between the major and minor third, and can also fluctuate. An analysis using Praat goes some way towards indicating the varied sizes of the interval that can appear within a single song. I identified the pitch of each sustained third degree in a sample of songs, and calculated the size of the interval using the pitch of the closest first degree adjacent to each respective third. This analysis therefore recognises that even the first degree is not necessarily constant. All the recordings were taken by a respected senior lady in a church who sang them for me to record in the same evening<sup>59</sup>. 'Lal Lungawi' was a hymn that I did not experience in church and does not form one of my 69 documented songs, but her recording is clear and suitable for use in this analysis.



**Figure 11:** Graph showing size of the melodic interval of the third across time in five songs

It is clear from the graph above that the identity of the third in Mizo singing must be described as 'ambivalent', rather than having a fixed identity. However, with the exception of 'Lal Lungawi', in which over-compensation seems to have taken place when the third became too small, the other songs do demonstrate some consistency. In each case the third remains strictly below 390 cents, and never falls below 310 cents. Even in 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin' the third begins below this level but does not return to it.

<sup>59</sup> She granted permission for her recordings to be analysed to support my wider study but asked that her name and the actual recordings would not be included in this thesis.

It is therefore possible to suggest that the interval of the third would tend to lie between 310 and 390 cents. This range is a little higher than the just-tempered major third (386) and a little lower than the just minor third (316), but altogether lower than the equal-tempered major third of the modern instrumental tuning of the West (400 cents). If this range seems too large to be credible, we may consider Kubik's similar analysis of the blue third (2008: 29), in which he observes an even higher level of fluctuation between 267 and 386 cents, a range of 119 cents, considerably more than a semitone. Fluctuation over a large range should not dissuade us from identifying the third as an important and characteristic interval. Instead, like Kubik, we may consider the Mizo third to be an entity which spans a wider range than we may be familiar with in western equal temperament.

The limits indicated by the graph are significant because of their midpoint: 350 cents. This is the interval which sits between the equal-tempered major and minor third, as well as being the exact midpoint of a perfect fifth. The average produced from the average intervals of each of the above songs (see below) also tends remarkably closely to this, at 349 cents. Tempting as it may be to suggest that the Mizo third is characterised by 350 cents, the high level of variability illustrated above serves as a caution. It seems that it is much more accurate to acknowledge the fluctuation of the third in *lengkhawm zai*, and to identify 349 cents as no more than the average interval which confirms that the third certainly does remain lower than the major third of any of the main systems of western temperament.

Van Hmun Ropui Pelin	326
Ram Thianghlina	358
Mal Min Sawm Turin	349
Lal Lungawi	364
Hlimna Ni Ropui	347
<b>Average (Cents)</b>	<b>349</b>

Figure 12: Table showing average third intervals for five songs (cents)

To avoid assigning a false notion of tonality to the melodies, my transcriptions all notate the third without any accidental, yet they will all have been smaller than 400 cents. Such thirds have been observed elsewhere in numerous different contexts, from Anglo-American folksong to North African Islamic music. Cecil Sharp was among the first to suggest the phenomenon of a neutral third that defied modal structures of analysis, when he encountered such singing in American folk hymns, and Jackson confirms that this was still the case at the time of his study, advocating the term's application to black and white gospel traditions instead of the preoccupation with the 'blue notes' of the blues (1975: 236). Even the scholar of blues music

Tallmadge (1984: 158) has agreed that such notes are found globally so that a less genre-specific term needs to be applied; he suggests the ‘worried third’ (Ibid: 155-156).

Watt (1917: 137) claimed that the third of an Arabic lute and the Highland bagpipes both sat at 355 cents, and relates the story of the ‘middle finger of Zalzal’ that in the case of the lute it was obtained by a relatively simple ratio of string division (27/22: the average of the Pythagorean major and minor thirds). This may indicate that music cultures with stringed instruments, such as the Mizo one-string bowed *tingtang*, could have obtained the neutral third through logical and mechanical means. But the fact remains, based on the limited data available for this study, that the sung interval of the third, though understood through the reading of tonic sol-fa to be the interval between *doh* and *mi*, can actually have a fairly large range of possible sizes.

Even if the Mizo people already sang with a neutral third, it has been suggested that the early missionaries might have come from congregations in which similar flattened pitches were also conventional. While this would not negate the likelihood that the manner of singing found in *lengkhawm* is similar to that which was practised before the missionaries, this would offer a possible further element of compatibility as well as implying that the first *sol-fa zai* translations that were introduced did not sound as diatonic as we might imagine. However, it is difficult to know what congregational singing sounded like at the turn of the twentieth-century in Welsh Presbyterian and London Baptist congregations, let alone the specific missionaries who came to Mizoram. While it is true that many Welsh hymn tunes such as ‘Ebenezer’ and ‘Llef’ are renowned for their minor modality, such hymns tend to be clearly identified as such by their notation and harmony; their modality is not necessarily the result of performance practice.

Indeed, if such singing was prevalent then it is likely to have been in congregations in which tonic sol-fa was not practised. In 1902 Goddard had been reporting that the introduction of tonic sol-fa in Welsh schools was teaching children to sing ‘in beautiful harmony, with true intonation’ (59). Other contemporary reports in such publications as *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* (1885, 1889 for example) never hesitate to comment upon the intonation of competing choirs at the time, and although sometimes critical, the attention to it suggests that accurate intonation was considered to be a commendable quality in amateur competitive circles. Somewhat later, however, in 1924 (417), Lloyd admits that ‘Celtic emotionalism has the habit of getting the better of intonation’, painting a spectacular picture of ‘screaming’ choirs. The situation is therefore unclear, but the Welsh missionaries in Mizoram introduced tonic sol-fa at a very early stage and this tradition was particularly reinforced by the arrival of the



music specialist Katie Hughes whose Lushai choir was received to great acclaim by Presbyterians throughout North India, so it really does seem unlikely that flattened intonation would have been characteristic of the missionaries themselves. Besides, as the following discussion will illustrate, the Mizo *thluk* consists not just in a neutral singing of the third but in the substitution of this third in place of other pitches such as the fourth and second degrees, a melodic modification that would most certainly not have originated from the Welsh purveyors of tonic sol-fa.

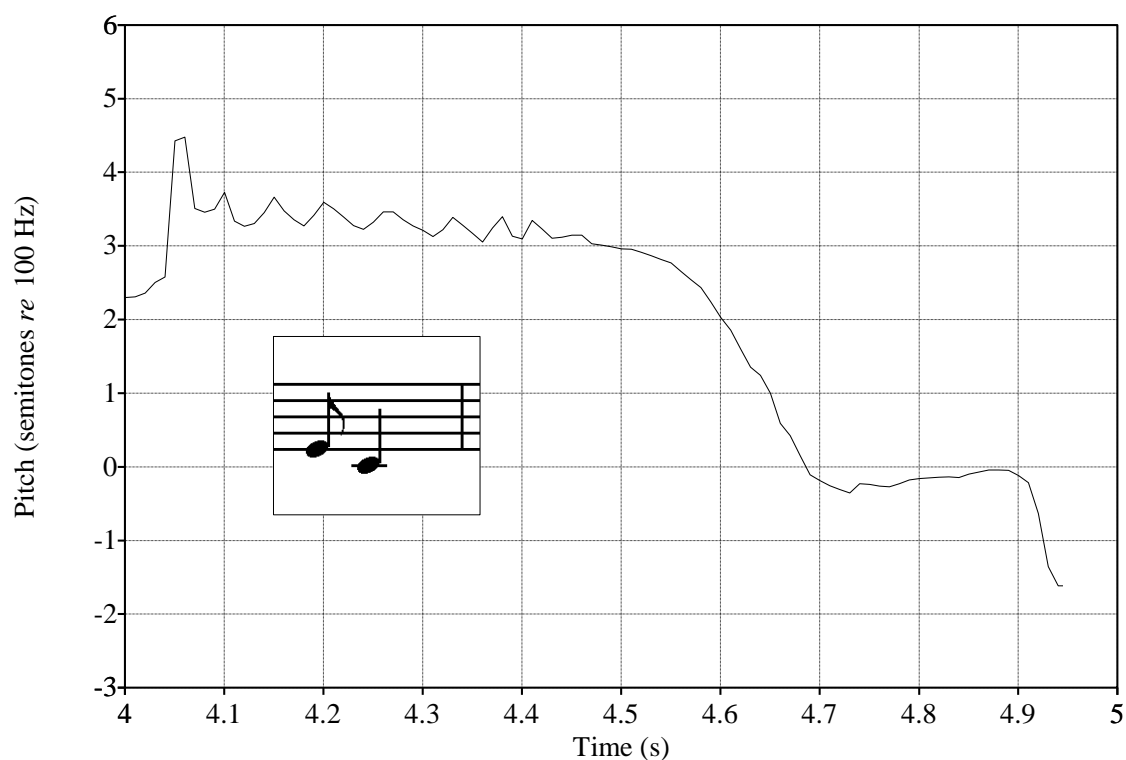
Returning to the problem at hand, we may conclude that in the Mizo context the neutral third is preferable to the 'blue note' terminology which implies an adherence to the 'blues scale' which conventionally involves a flattened seventh (Tallmadge 1984: 157). The leading tone is nearly always absent in Mizo music, and phrases never end in the  $\hat{7}-\hat{1}$  melodic progression so common in western hymns. Indeed, if ever it does appear it forms part of a descent from the first degree rather than a lead up to it. Furthermore, as was touched upon earlier, Kubik is determined that the neutral third must be distinguished from the blue third because of its smaller range, which he suggests lies between 320 and 360 at an average interval of 342.8 cents (1999: 120). Our Mizo neutral third has a wider range, but I believe the terminology remains valid and justified. Given further opportunity it would be worthwhile to analyse a greater range of songs by a range of singers to consolidate this tentative conclusion.

The characteristic bending, especially of the third degree, is called *thluk kuai* in Mizo. *Kuai* is defined as 'to droop, to hang down', as well as 'to pull, to draw, to hook.' It can be extended to a variety of situations, such as tugging someone's arm to gain their attention, or pulling a branch of a tree down to obtain its fruit. The sound has often been described to me by Mizo speakers as 'bendings' in English. In my notated transcriptions I have attempted to indicate moments of fluctuation using slurs. Sometimes, where it is particularly pronounced, I have notated the actual pitches which clearly form an important part of the variant (see Example 8). Such methods have been adopted by many scholars, most of whom have expressed a similar frustration with their limitations. The same marks can be used to signify what in reality are very different modifications. Not only may they be formed differently, but they may also have different meanings: some may be spontaneous, some may be part of the accepted way of singing the song, some may be original, introduced for the first time, some may be personal to the singer, others may be unique to a particular church. None of these considerations can be sufficiently indicated by a musical slur.

Praat can be of assistance to the first problem, of examining what actually takes place during the singing of certain pitches. The following analysis extracts the exact contour of every

instance of the sung third to first degree in a verse of ‘Ram Thianghlma.’ This motif, epitomising *thluk kuai*, can be seen to behave in a distinctive way. Figures 13 and 16 perhaps act as the best models, demonstrating an insecure third degree that glides smoothly (4.5-4.7 seconds in Figure 13) to a steadier first degree. Figure 14 is jagged because of the melodic reiteration of the third degree, but again the same smooth glide can be perceived, leading down to the first degree (6.2-6.5 seconds).

Figure 15 is particularly interesting because it is one instance in which the notation does not call for the third degree, moving from a C to a D and back to a C in bar 7. This is counter-intuitive to the Mizo treatment of the second degree. In all my congregational and solo recordings, the D is replaced with an E that bends down in bar 6, followed by another E bending to a C in bar 7. This first E is explicitly illustrated in the graph, in which the E is stated but plunges rapidly to a C before returning to a much flatter third that lingers on the second degree before reaching C again.



**Figure 13:** ‘Ram Thianghlma’, singing from E to C (transposed) in bar 2. Again, in this and subsequent figures, 0 semitones represents the tonic C transposed to 100 Hz.

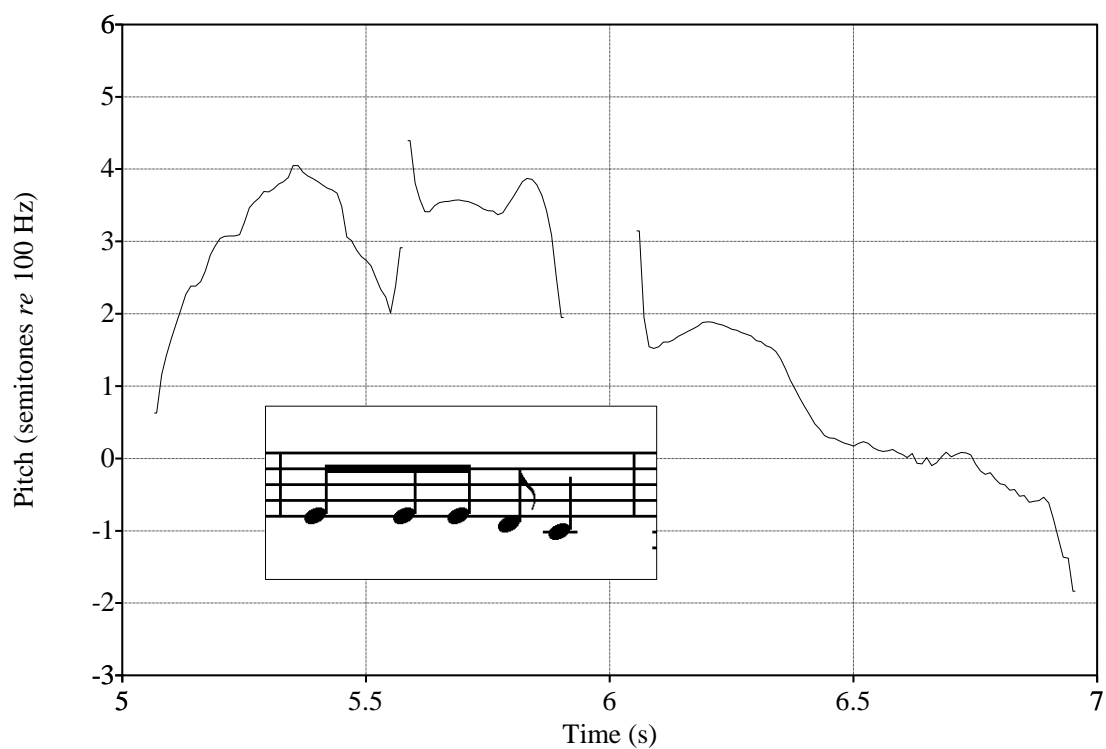


Figure 14: 'Ram Thianghlma', E to C, bar 3

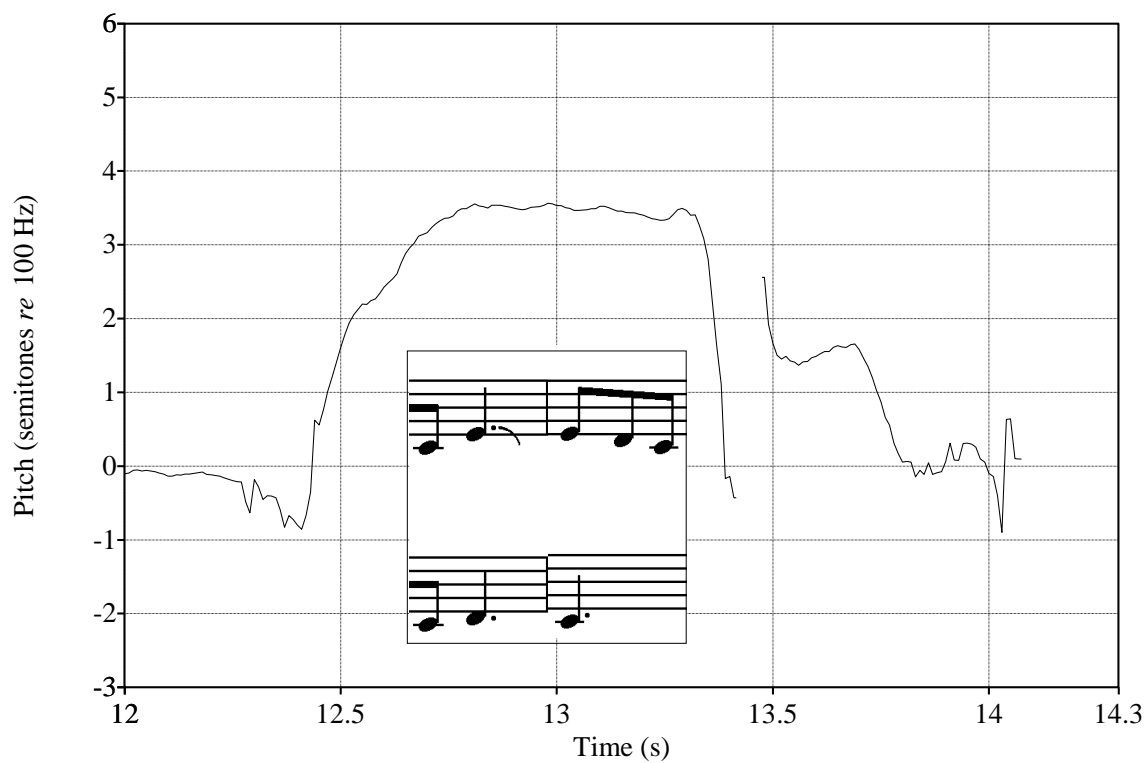


Figure 15: 'Ram Thianghlma', bars 6-7 (upper notation as sung, lower notation as written)

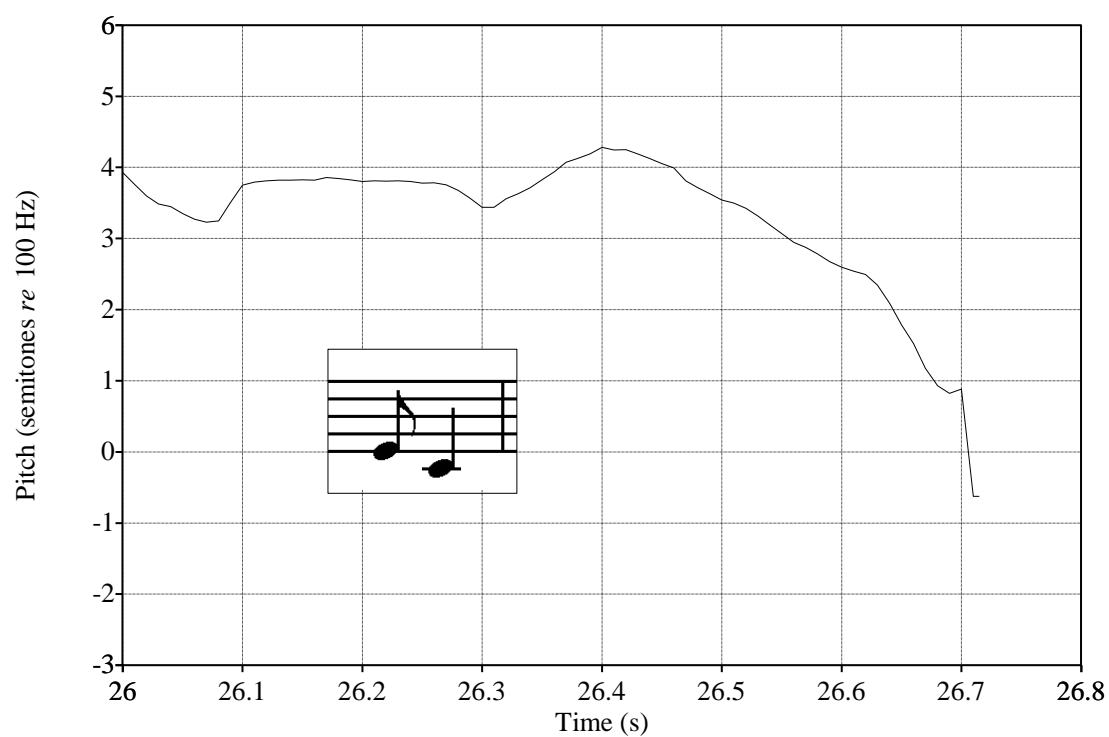


Figure 16: 'Ram Thianghlina', bar 12

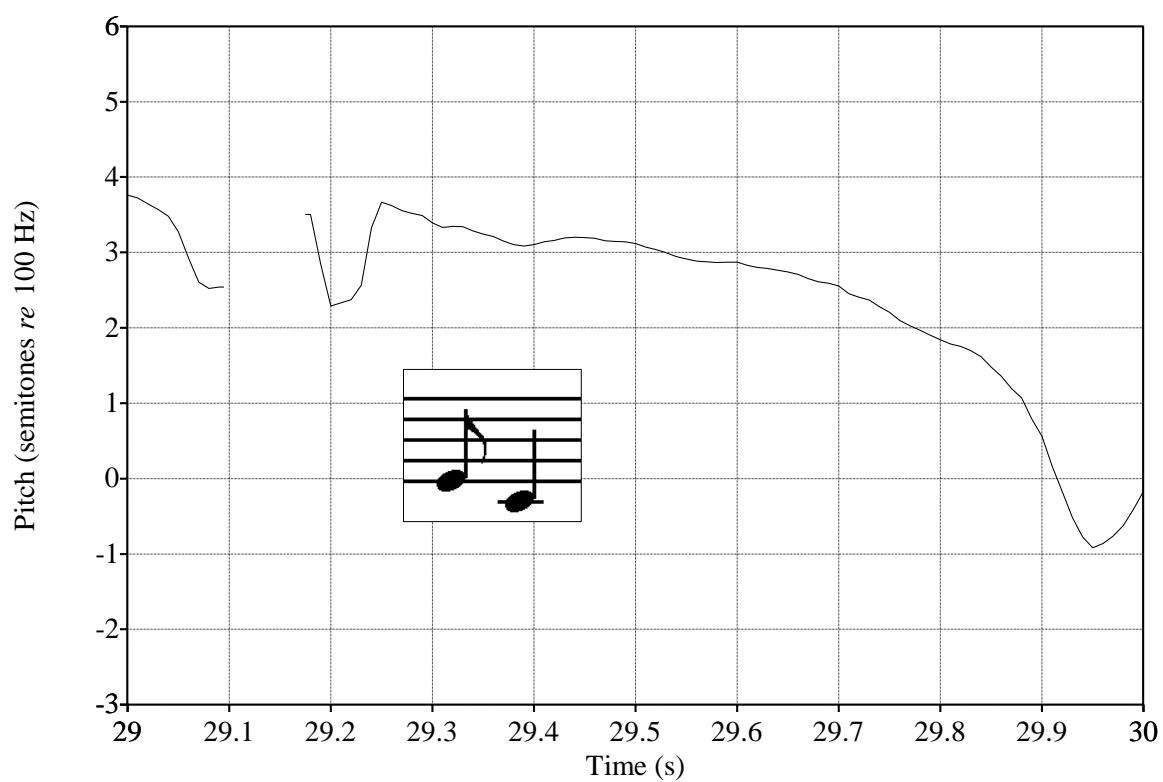


Figure 17: 'Ram Thianghlina', bar 14

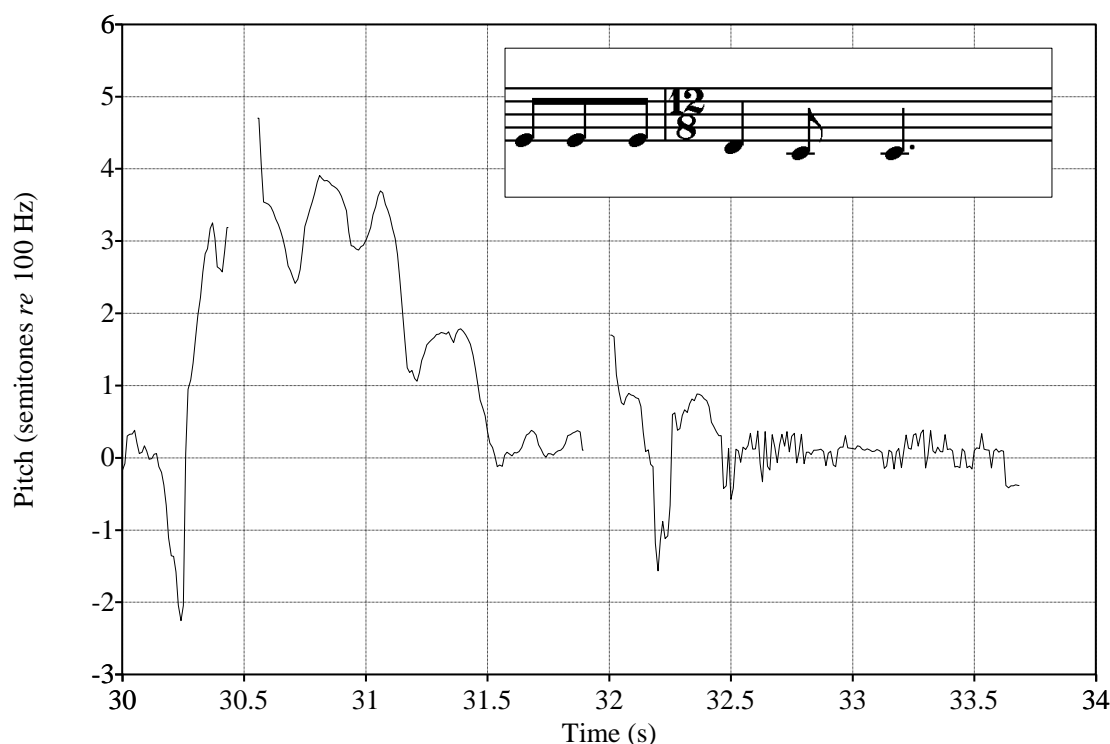


Figure 18: 'Ram Thianghlma', bars 14-15

Figures 17 and 18 take place within the space of two bars at the end of the verse, but present an immediate comparison with the nature of the third depending on its notation. Like Figures 13 and 16, Figure 17 is not notated with a D, and the glide is shown to be a smooth fall. By contrast, Figure 18 contains reiterations of the E due to the melody, as well as a notated pass through the D. Both factors result in a jagged and unsteady fall to the first degree.

The 'bendings' of the third degree can be clearly demonstrated to be an important aspect of Mizo singing, supported by detailed pitch analysis. However, this has also proven to reveal a difference between bendings that occur on third degrees which are notated alone with no adjacent second, and those which are notated with a passing second. Although the bending still takes place, it is much less smooth when a second degree is notated. Furthermore, when, as is often the case, the third degree is reiterated, each statement seems to require a small bend down of its own, resulting in a very jagged contour that reflects the general pattern of third descent that characterises the rest of the singing.

### 3.1.5 The *Thluk*: A Summary

As was stated at the outset, this has not been a chronological analysis, and the model *thluk* is by no means an indication of how songs must have sounded before Christianity. We are under no illusion that the *lengkhawm thluk* is, in its very identity, a product of the 'indigenisation of

western tunes' (Lalrinsanga 2011: 23). A relationship with western hymn tunes is a fundamental part of its identity, and observations that reflect this relationship should not be disregarded as irrelevant. Stillman warns of this 'danger of disinterest' in which features which sound western to the ethnomusicologist are prematurely ignored, even though they might have a much greater indigenous significance to those who apply them. In her Polynesian case study, she asserts that 'Christian hymnody is traditional music' (1993: 97). Similarly, this study has demonstrated that it is impossible to distil *lengkhawm zai* into foreign and indigenous parts. It is wholly indigenous, yet in a large part founded out of a once-foreign tradition, which demonstrated compatibilities in some aspects and major differences in others. Again, we are led to the conclusion that *lengkhawm* as a tradition is defined as such by its very debt to the modern influence of western hymns.

An attempt to describe the characteristics of the *thluk* of *lengkhawm zai* is therefore somewhat less straightforward than might have been expected. Phrase structures and contours offer little that can be claimed to be particularly characteristic. Instead, we find that it is the actual pitches used, and the behaviour of each pitch as well as the vocal style in which they are sung, that most clearly define and identify what the *thluk* is. We have a tune which is pentatonic in scope, but which almost exclusively focuses on the first, third and fifth scale degrees. Each of these pitches has independent functions:

The first degree is treated as the tonic, so that the introduction of guitars and keyboards has led to the overwhelming use of tonic and dominant harmonisation. Most phrases and certainly most verses and songs end on this degree.

The third degree is perhaps the most important melodic note, if not the most important harmonic note (this distinction should go to the tonic). It is usually sung as a neutral third, lying at around 350 cents, but this is in fact highly variable. It always falls, whether as part of an extended melodic descent to the first degree, or as a descending vocal inflection.

The fifth degree occasionally features above the third, sometimes decorated by a short deviation to the sixth, but serves to accentuate the overall descending nature of the tune from the third to the first degree. However, the primary position of the fifth is at the opening of songs and phrases, with many compositions opening with a low fifth degree leaping to the first. Even where such motifs are not present, vocal analysis has shown that the style of singing tends to open with a low indeterminate pitch before the tonic, such that the composed versions seem to emulate this. Thus this pitch might be interpreted not necessarily as a

dominant with harmonic significance, but as a functional low pitch with which to open a phrase or song.

The second degree rarely features without being a part of the descent from  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{1}$ . It does not have an independent significance, although some phrases end on a  $\hat{2}$  (when the fall from the third does not quite reach the tonic), implying a dominant harmonisation which serves to perform the same function as an imperfect cadence.

The sixth degree also tends to be heard only as an inflection from the fifth, as in the following example:



Example 9: 'Khawvelah Hian', opening bars, inflection in bar 3

Alternatively it can act as a passing note when the tonic falls down to the fifth degree (in itself a fairly unusual motif):



Example 10: 'Eden Par Mawi', opening bars, passing 6<sup>th</sup> degree in bar 2

Thus, although we have seen that such models are not structurally consistent, we can construct a pitch-based model of a typical version of the tune, illustrating what Nettl would call the 'melodic motion' (2005: 154):

Verse Part 1: Low  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}-\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}-\hat{1}-//-\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}$  (dominant harmony)

Verse Part 2: Low  $\hat{5}-\hat{1}-\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}-\hat{1}-//-\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}-\hat{1}$

Chorus:  $\hat{3}$  ("Aw") –  $\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}-\hat{1}-//-\hat{3}$  (prolonged) –  $\hat{2}-\hat{1}$

It is clear then that while construction of the melody and its sense of balance and shape might not differ a great deal from the western hymns, the Mizo quality is to be found in the functions and use of the pitches themselves. As Pachuau has concluded, the western hymns

were ‘softened by the people’, implying that they continued to form the essential basis but that certain elements such as the ‘syntax, melody and rhythm’ were ‘mellowed’ (2002: 133).

### 3.2 The *Thluk* in *Sol-fa zai*

The proportion of *lengkhawm zai* to *sol-fa zai* in the Mizo repertory can be misleading, forming just ten percent of my collection. Of the 69 documented songs, only ten (14.4%) were composed as *lengkhawm zai*. Only two of these were not Christmas songs, demonstrating that they tend to dominate only during *zaikhawm*, and indeed when the number of times each song was sung is taken into account, these ten songs alone come to form nearly half of my sample. The Christmas songs were repeated almost daily during the Christmas period. I did not experience Easter, but *zaikhawm* is also a feature of Easter worship, and it is likely that another set of *lengkhawm zai* are the songs of choice for these occasions. Those which were not sung at Christmas were, significantly, sung during the Baptist Assembly in March 2012, reflecting the heightened spiritual atmosphere of such a large annual gathering.

In addition to the *lengkhawm zai* compositions analysed above, 19 other songs (27.5% of my total) were sung in *lengkhawm* style, deviating from the notated *sol-fa*. This includes both western hymns (14) and original Mizo songs (5), all of which have been notated in four parts of *sol-fa*, hence the term *sol-fa zai* applied to all, regardless of origin. In practice, it tends to be only when songs are sung in this *lengkhawm* style that people will be more inspired to dance at the front of the church. It is the sung tune, rather than the origin of the song that will prompt this expression of ‘Mizo spirituality’ through dance, and it is interesting that in my collection the adaptation was applied more frequently to western than Mizo hymns. This may be due to the earlier introduction of these hymns by missionaries, leaving them more exposed to being ‘softened’ during and after the revivals. The term ‘softened’ is often used in written sources and by personal informants to describe the process of turning *sol-fa zai* into *lengkhawm zai*. One insightful description remains from Mrs Angus, who visited the area in 1932, just as the tune and *lengkhawm* had become established:

The Lushais sing very well, but seem to have little indigenous music. They sing hymns in parts in Tonic Sol-fa, but one queer thing is that they seem unable to get the 7<sup>th</sup> note of the octave, and in singing a scale would get the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> *te-doh* almost the same. They are inclined to turn the tunes into the minor too, and many of the Sankey tunes come out like negro spirituals<sup>60</sup>. (Angus 1932: handwritten report)

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<sup>60</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma (2006: 297) cites a similar observation by Lewis (probably Sir John Herbert Lewis), an MP who visited his daughter in 1924 while she was working as a missionary in Mizoram. He



This reveals that much of what we concluded above has been characteristic of the *thluk* since its inception. The absence of the 7<sup>th</sup> is still a contemporary feature, and her comparison with minor modality and negro spirituals reflects our identification of a Mizo neutral third which lies lower than the major third.

The 39 remaining songs (56.5%) were notated and sung as authentic *sol-fa zai*, often translated from western hymns or borrowing from western harmonised tunes. That is not to say that they form a homogenous group of western-sounding songs; their compositional and performed style are worthy of a further study that is beyond the scope of this thesis. The remaining eleven are original Mizo compositions or translated from tunes of the neighbouring Khasi people, reflecting a generous range amongst the *sol-fa zai* of local and western tunes. Details of all 69 songs are documented in Appendix B.

The body of western hymns that entered the Mizo repertoire is in fact highly disparate in origin, as well as the dates in which they were introduced and translated. Moreover, the Mizo *sol-fa zai* also betray this diversity of influence. Writing in four-part harmony was a very new concept in Mizoram and composers can be seen to have been highly influenced by the contrapuntal devices employed more by the American composers than by the British, such as the fuguing and antiphony explored by Tallmadge (1968). This would have been done without an awareness of the different cultural backgrounds and situations from which the different western hymns emerged.

As Downey (1965: 116) and Jackson (1975) have highlighted, the Sankey hymns were originally intended for the more reserved revival atmosphere that characterised Moody's revivals, in contrast to the earlier American folk revival of the beginning of the nineteenth century which bore a much closer behavioural relationship with the ecstasies of Wales and Mizoram in 1904 and 1906. Yet it was these Sankey hymns that were appropriated into the music that sparked the Mizo revivals. This recontextualisation of the Sankey hymns is not unique; even in America they have been used in vastly different worship contexts to those for which they were first intended. McCauley even highlights this as an omission in Titon's analysis of Appalachian Baptist singing, in which she claims that he fails to observe the disparity between the way in which the Sankey hymns are sung by rural congregations, and the sociological origins of the hymns amongst the middle classes of urban North America (1989: 145). The distinct connotations of the Sankey hymns compared with the Welsh hymns, then, do not appear to have been significant to Mizo composers.

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explicitly identified a 'pentatonic' pitch-set with the absence of *fa* (4<sup>th</sup> degree) and *te* (7<sup>th</sup> degree), corresponding to our analysis above.

The motivic unity that already exists in western hymn melodies is developed through the modifications made to them through *lengkhawm zai*. For example, the fall from  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{1}$  observed above is brought to pervade even the singing of western hymns. Thus most phrases are modified to contain this motif, either repeated or as an over-arching contour of the phrase. This is illustrated in the example below which is included on the DVD:



Example 11: 'Aw Lalpa, Chungnung ber', bars 6-11

The importance of this motif in the singing of western hymns serves to support the theory that it is of primary importance in characterising the *thluk* of *lengkhawm zai*. To investigate this further I examined eleven of my transcriptions of modified *sol-fa zai*, counting the number of times the fall matched the original tune, and how many times it deviated. In the graph below, the first two bars in black are a preliminary indication of the fairly balanced number of falling, rising and static third degrees in the notation of the songs. 'Static' means that it neither falls nor rises. This sets the context for the following four possibilities in performance:

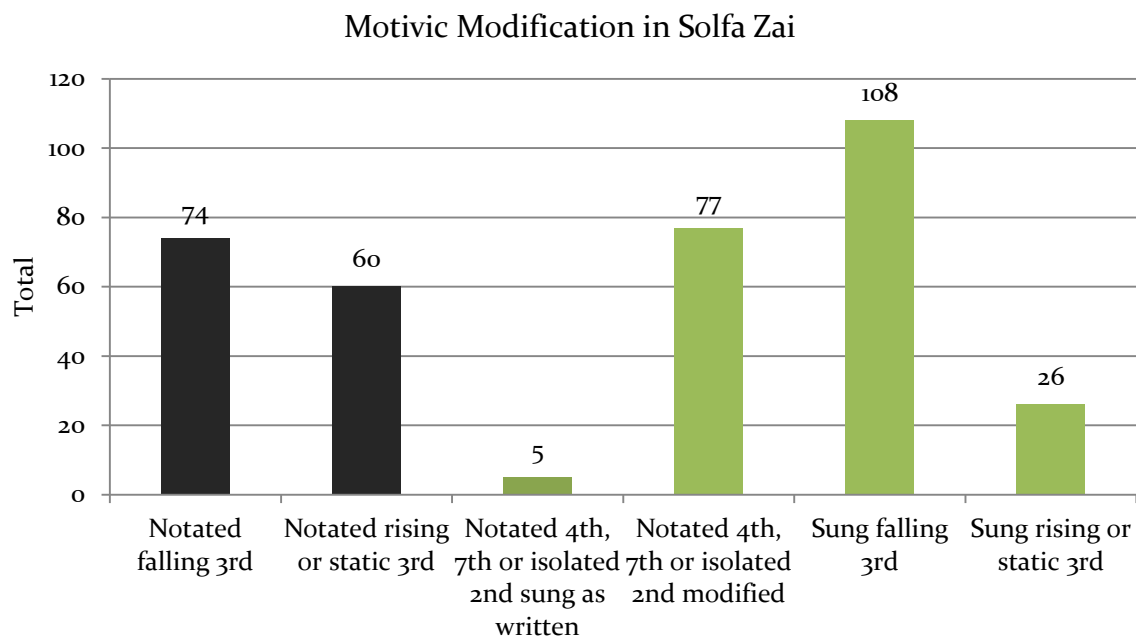
*Notated 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or isolated 2<sup>nd</sup> sung as written*: This relates to pitches which would not normally be found in *lengkhawm zai*, but which are retained in *lengkhawm* performances of *sol-fa zai*.

An 'isolated 2<sup>nd</sup>' is a second degree which does not form a part of a fall from  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{1}$ .

*Notated 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or isolated 2<sup>nd</sup> modified*: The pitches described above are modified when sung, to conform better to the *lengkhawm thluk*. They may be replaced by a 3<sup>rd</sup> for example.

*Sung falling 3<sup>rd</sup>*: Whether notated or the result of modification, this counts the number of times the third degree falls in the singing of *sol-fa zai*.

*Sung rising or static 3<sup>rd</sup>*: Again, whether notated or the result of modification, this counts the number of times the third degree behaves in a way that is not consistent with the *lengkhawm thluk*.



**Figure 19:** Graph showing total instances of motifs in eleven modified *sol-fa zai*

This supports much of what has already been suggested, that the falling of the third is an important element of the Mizo *thluk*. Although *sol-fa zai* might be notated with an even number of rising and falling thirds, the modified sung versions emphasise the fall much more, with the ratio of falls to rises being approximately 4:1. A lot of these falls will be substitutions for notated 4ths and isolated 2nds (7ths were very rare even in the notated *sol-fa zai*). The unacceptability of these scale degrees in *lengkhawm zai* is overwhelmingly affirmed in the above study in which 77 instances were modified (usually by being replaced with a falling 3<sup>rd</sup>), and only five instances remained as written (these being in just two songs).

To illustrate this process, consider ‘I Lal̥thut̥hleng’, a translation of EE Steele Elliot’s ‘Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne’ using Sankey’s tune. It was translated by Dr. Lalhuta Sailo (1886-1927) and first entered the KHB in 1915. Other examples include ‘Aw Lalpa, Chungnung ber’ and ‘Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U’, both of which are included on the DVD. The arpeggiated opening is important for ‘I Lal̥thut̥hleng’ and the transcription shows that this is a rising third that has been retained in the sung version whenever it appears. However the first notated appearance of an F natural in bar 3 is rejected, replaced by a falling E, which is sustained for a quaver which negates the prominence of the dominant G in the original. Even the isolated D natural in bar 4, a common phrase final in *lengkhawm zai*, is softened with an appoggiatura E.

# I Lalthutthleng leh Lallukhum I Rawn Kalsan

18/12 Ramhlun South  
Transposed from D

Solfa  
Transposed from F

3

a ka tan i lo kal - in; Ni-mah - se - la, Be-thle hem-ah hmun a awm lo, Nang, Mi

7

Thiang-hlim pi-a-nna a - tan Aw Lal - pa I su, lo kal rawh, I tan

11

hmun ka thin-lung - ah a awm; Aw Lal - pa I - su, lo

14

kal thuai rawh, I tan hmun ka thing-lung-ah a awm.

Example 12: 'I Lalthutthleng', complete

The F in bar 6 is again replaced with an E, but this rises to form another arpeggio to a G. It would seem that a rising third that is motivically consistent with other parts of the song is preferable to the use of the first inversion arpeggiated subdominant chord of the original. This also happens in bars 10 and 14. Even the F in bar 11 which is essentially a passing note between G and E is omitted when sung, leaping straight from G to E.

However, this has also shown that in the modification of western tunes there are several interesting discrepancies from the suggested model. The first is in the style of singing which tends to bend other pitches in a way that is not observed as frequently in original *lengkhawm zai*. This is probably because those songs do not feature other pitches sufficiently for it to be a feature. But in the singing of western hymns, the bending that normally would be heard on  $\hat{3}$  is also observed elsewhere. This is illustrated in the extract below from 'Lal Isua Hming.' This correlates with Poladian's suggestion (1942: 205) that otherwise constant characteristics such as melodic patterns and direction, as well as the filling of intervallic gaps, might be more varied when there is a 'genre shift'. Perhaps the 'bendings' on the third degree, though remaining constant from traditional singing, were extended to characterise the slightly varied melodic style of the 'new genre': the early interactions between traditional singing and the western hymns which had a more diatonic range of notes.

17/12 Ramhlun South  
(Transposed from F)

Lal I-sua hming i fak ang u, An - gel chawi-mawi - a chu\_\_\_ Lal -

KHB 52 Thluk 2  
(Transposed from Bb)

KHB 52 Thluk 3  
(Transposed from F)

5  
ber lu-khum la\_\_\_chhuak u - la Lal - ber khum-tir rawh u,\_\_\_ Lal - ber\_\_\_khum-tir rawh

Example 13: 'Lal Isua Hming', verse and beginning of chorus

All western hymns as they are sung in Mizoram are ‘variants’, a term which could be applied to those which undergo little change except instrumentation, accompaniment, language and performance context as well as to those which are modified to suit the *lengkhawm thluk*. An example of the former is ‘Krista Kohhran Tan Kan Ding’, a translation of ‘For Christ and the Church we Stand’, composed in 1898, which is sung almost unchanged. As can be heard on the DVD, the lower male voices in the congregation even sing the typically American gospel antiphonal devices employed by the composer George Stebbins:

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Krista Kohhran Tan Kan Ding'. It features two staves: a top staff for the Congregation (Cong.) and a bottom staff for the Bass. Both staves are in 4/4 time and use a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The Congregation staff has a 'Drum-leader' section at the beginning and a 'Congregation' section later. The lyrics are written below the staves. The Bass staff has a 'First line verse 2 and 3 only' section. The lyrics for the Congregation are 'Kris - ta Koh-hran tan kan ding, Ril - ru - a in-zawm - in; Kan aw A - mah fak'. The lyrics for the Bass are 'kan ding'.

Example 14: ‘Krista Kohhran Tan Kan Ding’, opening bars

But the most significant variants are those which have been modified almost beyond recognition. The process that has taken place among some of the *sol-fa zai* songs analysed above reflects some of Nettl’s findings in other cultures. The Amish for example are known to have maintained the German hymns of their ancestors, as well as introducing a small number of Anglo-American hymns. In both cases, however, they have undergone the ‘Amish process of slowing and ornamenting the material beyond recognition’ (1957: 327). Thus, in a very close parallel to the Mizo situation, Nettl finds that the style and the song can have very different sources, and that the singing style has been maintained in the new songs, even though that style in its original context is obsolete. In the same way, the Mizo people no longer sing the songs that were sung before Christianity, yet the singing style that has been applied to the new hymns can give an interesting indication of what they might have sounded like.

Vanlalchhuanawma offers the conclusion that the ‘new songs’ (as he calls those that belong to *lengkhawm zai*) differed from *tlanglam zai* in ‘structure and content’, and differed from the western songs in ‘rhythm and tune’ (2006: 296). Viewed in the light of the preceding analysis, this is an insightful observation: the *thluk* of *lengkhawm zai* is unique and is neither wholly related nor wholly different from either the traditional or western tunes. The three-phrase structure, ‘puma’ refrain and unmetered rhythm of *tlanglam zai* have been lost, but in responding to the western tunes, the drum has persisted in a binary beat despite other rhythmic adaptations, and the tunes were reduced to conform to Mizo pentatonicism. Above all, this chapter has demonstrated that much greater complexities about the relationship

between different musical traditions that form new styles can be revealed when the musical sound and vocal technique are studied in detail. Any simplistic narratives that may be extracted from *lengkhawm's* history in Chapter 2 must be qualified with its complex relationship with the musical style and culture of the past as well as with the hymnody of western Christianity and the gospel music that followed in subsequent decades through the radio and television. Having established this need, this will form the subject of the following chapters.

## 4. A Spiritual Society: *Lengkhawm* and Traditional Values

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The extent to which *lengkhawm* is identified as traditional rests not just on musical analysis. It is crucial to elucidate what ‘traditional’ means at a deeper level within Mizo society. As was discussed in Chapter 2, it is more relevant to study *lengkhawm* within the framework of what is considered to be traditional in Mizoram. Local perceptions of which values are important and significant in society and the historical narrative that has projected these to be symbolic of Mizo tradition inform the way in which we can understand the place of *lengkhawm* as a modern embodiment of these traditional values. It does reflect a continuity of the musical tradition that existed before Christianity, but this chapter extends the discussion by interpreting the factors that led to the formation of *lengkhawm* as an appropriate tradition, suited to the Mizo spirituality. What does it really mean for the Mizo people to identify *lengkhawm* as traditionally Mizo?

### 4.1 Encountering Christianity

It is so often claimed that when a people accept Christianity, the former religion is supplanted by the new. Even Lawmsanga (2010: 97), who is generally positive about the modern Mizo worship tradition, states that the social changes adopted by the new Mizo converts ‘led to a loss of tradition.’ Even if we recognise certain aspects of continuity in the new worship pattern, whether we call this syncretism, indigenisation, contextualisation or inculturation, historical ethnographies often tell a narrative that involves one religion giving way to another. This is true even of Mizo scholars who write about their own history. But with reference in particular to Amselle (1998), it is worth demonstrating the weakness of this assumption and the insights that can be gained from examining the true situation.

It must be recognised that just as the Mizo people as a homogenous ethnic people group did not exist as a concept to themselves until the beginning of British administration, their religion could not have been described as a standardised system of belief that dominated the Lushai Hills. The importance of the single Mizo identity, which was an essentially British construction, has dominated the perspective from which Mizo writers have described their former practices. Many of the deep cultural values and even the practices have only relatively



recently been designated 'Mizo'<sup>61</sup>, but it is impossible to ignore the likelihood that many aspects of religion had a highly localised character.

Early support for this lies in the commonly-cited belief that the souls of the dead would pass through Rih Dil, a large lake separating Mizoram from Myanmar in the north. If the tradition that the people migrated from the Chin Hills before settling in the Lushai Hills is accepted, we must also accept that this belief did not form a part of the 'religion' until the lake was encountered not more than four centuries ago. The belief in the lake's role could not have formed a part of their religion before, and might not have formed any part of the belief of the Mizo people living in the far south. Likewise many 'Mizo' legends recounted even today in books and dramas pre-date the homogenous concept of the Mizo people. At their peak role in shaping belief, they would have been limited to the locality in which they were set, with specific geographical landmarks still standing as testimony to the story's veracity. Stories are still told about specific waterfalls and caves, but the ownership of the stories has now been assimilated into the popular idea of the one Mizo religion and culture that existed before Christianity. Though the beliefs and traditions may have had much in common, the actual demographic and geographical extent to which this was the case would not have been known at the time.

Ranger's biography of Thompson Samkange of Zimbabwe includes an interesting parallel. In attempting to find a useful and constructive window through which to view the other belief systems that existed before and alongside Christianity in Zimbabwe, Samkange realised that there were 'specific African cultural values which ought to be preserved' and which could even be understood to be more helpful than some of the more materialistic (as opposed to spiritual) and individualistic character of the Christianity of the missionaries (1995: 65). However, this approach naturally led to a homogenised concept of traditional religious beliefs, referred to by Ranger himself simply as 'Zimbabwean African religion' (Ibid).

Similarly, Amselle identifies this as a more realistic picture of religiousness in Mali before it became recognisably Islamised. It was not necessarily homogenous or systematic (1998: 120). The parallels between his case study and the Mizo context are clear, as he recognises the role of colonial administration in the current idea of the one former religion. According to Amselle, it was actually the very cultural sensitivity and desire for 'indirect rule' on the part of the colonial superintendents that led to a naïve conglomeration of varied localised traditions

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<sup>61</sup> Smaller more specific communities have, however, used similar terms from which 'Mizo' is derived to refer to themselves, such as 'Dzo' or 'Zo'.

into one 'pagan' whole (Ibid: 154). Just as it has in Mizoram, this has led people in Mali to tell a unified narrative; it has shaped the way they understand their collective history.

Rather than a supplantation of one religion for another, Amselle confirms that it is more helpful (in the Malian context) to identify 'waves of mass people movements' (Ibid: 121), which led to a gradual shaping of localised beliefs until they were eventually described as one unified brand of new religion. Whereas in Mali it is often claimed that the acceptance of Islam was a recent and sudden replacement of a former religion, Amselle identifies that the Islamisation of the localised beliefs was a slower process, such that many of the former traditions actually bear Muslim characteristics. To Amselle, there has been little to distinguish the diversity of Malian Islam from Malian paganism for many centuries. This relates to the conclusion of Leenhardt, the missionary-anthropologist, who held that animist believers were not seeking a 'new religion', but were instead willing to accept any new belief that made better sense of their environment and lives, representing a constant process of adaptation and development of their belief systems (Clifford 1992: 82). This to some extent confirms Geertz' view that the authority of a religion serves to facilitate rather than inspire worship; that is, worship is mediated through religion, yet the nature of the worship and its character tends to find its origins and inspiration in the cultural experience of daily life (1973: 110).

Although contracted to a few decades rather than a few of Amselle's centuries, the series of revivals described in Chapter 2 can also be identified as a similar but highly accelerated process of 'waves of mass people movements' encompassing the once disparate village communities of the Mizo people. Initial acceptance was small-scale, and the missionaries adapted their message in a way that sought to provide resolution to the problems of their existing beliefs. On encountering a people with no pre-existing concept of sin, atonement or any threatening afterlife, these subjects did not form an important part of the missionaries' message. Instead the fear of malevolent spirits was widespread, and the Christian story that a man had selflessly given his own life to successfully destroy them resonated strongly with the traditional ethics. Because of his self-sacrifice, the character of Jesus Christ was immediately recognised to present an ideal model of *tlawmngaihna* (see below), the ethic of complete selflessness. This reflects Leenhardt's view that the initial reception of a new belief system takes place within the framework of the current beliefs.

As we have seen, despite the initial resistance and self-alienation from the former lifestyle, the waves of revivals saw a gradual assimilation of Christianity that retained (or indeed, gained) a Mizo character. But now society had changed entirely. Instead of localised religion, the entire Mizo people (defined politically), were eventually described as belonging to one world

religion. Centrally-governed churches were organised (rather than the autonomous churches of western Baptists), in themselves a counter-cultural concept confirming the idea presented here that the Mizo as a people have been inherently disparate and localised in their religious practices. This is supported by the critical opinion of Kariapuram<sup>62</sup> (1999: 80) that ‘the church which is present among the tribals as a centralized institution can appear to be very alien.’ Indeed, the arrival of Christianity coincided with the organisation of the Mizo people as a people to such an extent that instead of describing a supplantation of a former Mizo life with a new way of life, Christianity can be said to have been crucial in the formation of what is now a Mizo people and their identity, as well as the story they have learnt to tell about their history.

## 4.2 The ‘Beautiful Mizo Life’

The preceding discussion emphasises the localised beliefs that once characterised Mizo worship. Yet certain values and practices seem to have been widely held. *Pathian* and *Khuanu* were the male and female characters of the supreme god. Buildings rarely had windows for fear of malevolent spirits. *Pialral* was the heaven reserved for the heroic; most could only aspire to an afterlife in *Mitthi Khua*, the ‘village of the dead’, a neutral but eternal continuation of their present existence. In the current Christian context, some ‘traditional values’ are being promoted as part of the Mizo approach to Christian worship. Whatever their actual importance in the former localised societies, very clear parallels have been drawn between the Christian values of Mizo society today, and those which were significant before Christianity. Fearing a gradual loss of these old values in a society that is increasingly exposed to secular influence through international mass media, Thanzaiva has recently been seeking to spark a new social movement aimed at returning to the core values which he identifies as being inherently Mizo. He has called this movement *Zonunmawi*, which literally means ‘Beautiful Mizo Life’, and published a book of the same name in 2012. It is clear that the idea of reclaiming all that is seen as ‘beautiful’ in the former way of life is a significant one in modern Mizo society.

Theologians in Northeast India have increasingly emphasised the need for ‘tribal’ or local theologies that address local contexts better than the western theological tradition, often perceived by Indian theologians to be tainted with colonial or post-colonial attitudes. This is reflected in the establishment of the Department for Tribal Studies at the Eastern Theological College in Jorhat, Assam. The fact that different cultures are conditioned to approach religion differently is widely accepted, and the following discussion illustrates the way in which the

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<sup>62</sup> A scholar based in Shillong.

Mizo culture as it currently exists contains important values that are bound to emphasise very different facets of Christianity than is often to be observed in the West: communitarian worship and accountability, a genderless or bi-gendered concept of God, and an openness to a deep consciousness of spirituality and spiritual inspiration.

It is needless to address these elements of Mizo society from an overtly theological perspective as such work already forms a large part of the existing literature on the subject. Nevertheless, its musical application and relevance to worship and especially *lengkhawm* has received much less attention, except in a recent article by Lalrinsanga (2011: 16-32). His is perhaps the first attempt by a Mizo writer to specifically address the musical aspects of *lengkhawm* as part of a theological and cultural study.

### 4.2.1 Community

The ‘non-individual nature of Mizo society’ is an important feature identified by Hlawndo (2011: 42), and this is epitomised in the integral role of sharing and giving. The proverb ‘sem sem dam dam ei bil thi thi,’ succinctly reflects this ethic: ‘share and live; eat alone and die.’ The Mizo context demonstrates that it is possible that reflections of Christian ideals such as ‘justice and righteousness’<sup>63</sup> can be already present in society, so that the acceptance of Christianity can be observed to have recontextualised or in some senses added value to some of these elements. Kuriakos (2007: 125) claims that in Northeast India, worship has been well-integrated, such that ‘tribals do not look at Jesus as non-tribal.’ Even the person of Jesus has become rooted in the tribal perspective in many parts of Northeast India, and in Mizoram this is supported by the way in which he is seen to epitomise the perfect *mi tlawmngai*.

A cursory review of academic Mizo literature will show that it is impossible to write about Mizo community without mentioning *tlawmngaihna*. Although it is popularly claimed that the word defies translation, Lalrinawma offers a helpful definition (2005: 124-125): ‘At the cost of considerable inconvenience to himself... [a *tlawmngai* person] tries to surpass others in doing his or her duty.’ Its associated social connotations and terminology quickly reveal its essence to the non-Mizo reader (see Kipgen 1997: 64-73): If *tlawmngaihna* is a quality, a person can ‘possess’ it. And if a person possesses *tlawmngaihna*, then they can be described as a *tlawmngai* person. From small but unrequired acts of kindness to the greatest deeds of self-sacrifice, such people continue to be identified in this way today, and the truest of *tlawmngai* people would never acknowledge themselves to be so. Schools now attempt to instil this

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<sup>63</sup> See Christou 2007: 52-53 who cites the biblical passage of Amos 5:21-24.

quality in children as part of the curriculum and patriotic songs celebrating Mizo life often refer to the value<sup>64</sup>.

Traditionally, *tlawmngaihna* could drive a warrior to perform a great act of heroism for the sake of his village. A hero like this had finally earned his place in *Pialral*, and the village would throw a feast. Similarly, a rich individual could attain *Thangchhuah* status by throwing a series of feasts and celebrations for the community, interpreted as demonstrating selfless generosity (Thanzauva 1989: 143). The importance of *tlawmngaihna* in the early converts' first acceptance of the message of Jesus has already been stated above. Related ethical values include *hnatlang* ('equality of being', see Hlawndo 2011) and *beirual* ('united effort'), which have both been integrated into other aspects of Christian worship, and which both relate to the high value placed on community effort and work.

We can also understand some of the roles within *lengkhawm* to demonstrate some of the essence of *tlawmngaihna*. The musicians and song-proclaimer for example choose to serve and facilitate the worship of the wider community by providing and directing the music (see Chapter 5). The very nature of their roles means that they cannot fully participate in the *lengkhawm*; they cannot dance, close their eyes or raise their hands in the same way as the others. Many might feel the same compulsion, but they sacrificially choose to retain their supportive roles. It is interesting to note at this stage that *lengkhawm* necessitates both the embodiment and subversion of expectations and values. For the sake of the community experience, musicians embody the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* by denying themselves the opportunity to participate with the other members of the community and by resisting the spiritual or sentimental impulses that the music might provoke.

When a member of a community dies, every member of the village or locality might be expected to visit the house of the deceased and remain keeping vigil (*khawhar lenpui*) for the entire night. The burial will be the following morning, and the whole community will have sacrificed their sleep to share in the grief of the family. Some will have travelled from distant towns to be present. The vigil consists of singing songs of the *lengkhawm* style to the beat of the drum all night, and the whole community participates. They will often have brought gifts of money and floral arrangements for the family. Weeks later a more formal 'condolence' service will be held in the home in which members of the community can give testimony about the deceased. In these occasions, it seems that *lengkhawm* has completely replaced any

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<sup>64</sup> Hnamte: 'Zo Nun Mawi' and Rokunga: 'Tlawmngaihna Hlu', for example.

other songs, music and dances that would once have taken place. It is certainly the new, Christian, but simultaneously traditional music for mourning.

From the earliest *Thangchhuah* feasts and the celebrations of a person's *tlawmngaihna* to the all-night singing and drinking parties (*zu hmun*), music-making has been an important accompaniment to manifestations of *tlawmngaihna* and *hnatlang*. Today, singing still forms a community event, whether at a funeral vigil or at a Christmas *zaikhawm*. Here *lengkhawm* becomes an important symbol for the united effort in worship; it can only be practised by a community, never alone. Lawmsanga (2010: 138, 182) particularly identifies this connection, relating *lengkhawm* to the Mizo ethic of *beirual*, which means 'united effort'. He recognises the way in which *lengkhawm* is a worshipful picture as well as a practical exemplification of *beirual*. He also believes that the *lengkhawm* itself as a performed act can promote and develop the unity of the community that takes part. Thus *lengkhawm* and the actual practice of it actively contribute to the sustained value of such ethics. Vanlalchhuanawma directly compares it with the democratic spontaneity of traditional celebrations:

Spontaneity is the shared characteristic [between *lengkhawm* and traditional events].  
No formal appointment of participants, nor order of meeting is as a rule made. (2006: 305)

Spontaneity and the lack of order in *lengkhawm* are what make the interactions between the participants particularly interesting. Especially amongst the musicians the scope for the subversion of leadership roles is higher than in the church service. Although the drummer is the musical leader, he is subject to an egalitarian democracy in which any member can suggest songs and even challenge his choice of key. This can be heard in the first example from the *zaikhawm* on the DVD, in which the key is set too low and the drummer is asked to start again. Likewise, repetitions of verses are determined by the song-proclaimer, but any member (including the musicians) can insist on further repetitions even after she has indicated that the song has finished. The performance of *lengkhawm* therefore depends on a united effort between participants and is open to the spontaneous contribution of any member. Those who have already demonstrated a degree of selflessness by providing the music must further expect to sacrifice some of their authority as they respond to the suggestions and criticism of the congregation.

As Cohen suggests, community is essentially a 'shared vocabulary' of symbols (1985: 114). The concept of 'community' may be too large to be reasonably identified as a mere symbol in Christian worship, yet the different ways it is manifested in different worshipping communities can each be treated as symbols of the wider ideal of Christian community,

epitomised in the Christian metaphor of the 'Body of Christ'<sup>65</sup> to represent the community of all Christians, living or dead. It is interesting to note that the early church community was called *ekklesia*<sup>66</sup> in Greek, whence we obtain the word 'ecclesiastical', meaning 'of the church'. *Ekklesia* literally referred to a gathering of people, and included political assemblies as well as the religious community of believers. This secular root is strongly paralleled in the *khawm* morpheme of both *zaikhawm* and *lengkhawm*, which simply refers to a 'gathering together'. *Inkhawm* refers to the worship service in the church. Thus the linguistic stress on corporate worship in the Mizo terminology directly reflects the Greek usage of the early church.

Indeed, Durkheim's stress on the communal theory of worship certainly resonates with the Mizo context. He is sometimes placed in opposition to the view of Leenhardt that worship is essentially 'man to maker' (Clifford 1992: 20-21), while the institution is secondary, yet it does not follow that the two approaches must be mutually exclusive. Participation is certainly at the heart of *lengkhawm*, but requires an individual response in the context of a community act, thus we see the possibility of combined individual and communitarian elements in the worship. In describing tribal Christian worship in Northeast India, Kujur (2007: 77) contrasts participatory worship with the individual 'pious' practice of the West. According to Kariapuram (1999: 80), the tribal communitarian ethos counters what he calls 'Indian consumerism and the caste system' and is characterised by participation instead of spectators. Thus, while the nature of individual response may be more corporate than in western worship traditions, it still forms an important inclusive role in enabling the individual to choose his or her level of participation.

We can therefore demonstrate, as Leenhardt (Clifford 1992: 106-107) put it, 'the gift of worshipful communion' in Mizo society as being relevant to an understanding of the importance of *lengkhawm* as a locally-derived form of worship that also epitomises many of the theological ideals of worship through its culturally-rooted symbolism and its practical expression of the gathered community of believers in corporate worship.

#### 4.2.2 Perceptions of Gender

Amselle defines ethnology and anthropology as two contrasting approaches to the study of a society. To Amselle (1998: 29), ethnology has a focus on 'hermeneutics', examining the meanings and interpretations that exist within the discourse of the society itself. Anthropology, by contrast, is concerned with the 'translation' of a society's values and

<sup>65</sup> See 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14.

<sup>66</sup> ἐκκλησία: Gathering of citizens (Strong's G1577).

practices so that they may be intelligible within the discourse of a usually western society. Missionaries concerned with scriptural translation and the re-interpretation of Christianity for a new society have encountered conflicting issues, but Amselle's distinctions can be of relevance in retrospect. Leenhardt, working in Polynesia, was unique in his anthropological approach to his missionary work, such that he gained the respect of anthropologists in France including Levi-Bruhl, Mauss and Rivet. But his approaches and convictions place him firmly, by Amselle's standards, in ethnology. His biographer Clifford gives extensive detail about Leenhardt's rigorous attempts to identify just the right language and metaphor with which to tell the Christian narrative from a culturally-relevant perspective. Most crucially to this study, he believed that the 'pagan' understandings of their supreme God were simply aspects of God's revelation of himself to them long before the arrival of the Christian religion. Convinced of this, he was careful in his choice of names for God, learning what each possible name would denote about the character of God, his immanence, and his transcendence (Clifford 1992: 80-81).

How to translate the gender of God was the question that faced the first missionaries to the Mizo people. They had a concept of a single supreme yet immanent deity, yet this god had a distinct male character and another female character. They behaved almost like two gods. The male 'Pathian' was regarded as the 'holy "pure" father' (Kipgen 1997: 115). 'Khuanu' was the maternal female. The Christian missionaries recognised that both characters of their god could be helpful in comprehending the different characteristics of the Christian God. Indeed, the Christian doctrine of the trinity was still more complex than the dualistic Mizo understanding. Eventually, for the purposes of Bible translation, the male form was adopted, and 'Khuanu' fell into disuse. She even became actively rejected by new converts, as part of the self-alienation process, and early Christian songs invoking the feminine name were strongly criticised.

But this has unsettled numerous Mizo scholars who have revisited these pivotal moments when the formation of Mizo Christianity began to be set down in the printed word. The rise of 'feminist theology' as an area of study has also reached Mizoram, and eminent female theologians such as Hnuni<sup>67</sup> (1999) and Chhungi<sup>68</sup> (2008) have advocated a feminisation of aspects of Mizo theology that they perceive to have been needlessly masculine. They claim that life for women in traditional society was deeply humiliating (a view supported by Downs 1994: 148), and that the male-dominated Christianity that followed has failed to adequately

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<sup>67</sup> Principal, AICS.

<sup>68</sup> Lecturer, ATC.



reform and liberate the status of women; misogynistic Mizo proverbs and linguistic peculiarities are cited as proof of a traditional society in which women were subjugated. Evoking the once-lost character of Khuanu, these scholars are calling for a return to the worship of God who is bi-gendered, or at least a-gendered.

Yet it is also interesting to examine the male and female roles that are evident in Mizo music and worship traditions. Though not regularly articulated, there have certainly been differentiated roles that do not necessarily reflect the inequality and subjugation suffered by women in non-musical aspects of society. For example Kipgen (1997: 100, 179) reminds us that the earliest Mizo composers were predominantly women, and that these women often gained powerful influence through the songs that they composed. It is therefore surprising that the Mizo composers of Christian songs have been almost exclusively male. Although women have enjoyed a high profile in gospel music performance (from Lalsangzuali Sailo of the 1970's to Lalthansangi of today as well as *The Chosen*, a contemporary all-girl band), it has continued to be the case that most Christian composers are male.

This apparent reversal of historic roles also finds a complementary perspective in an examination of the revival phenomena of the dancing and ecstatic experiences that led to *lengkhawm*. Although both men and women were affected, most accounts emphasise the susceptibility of women in particular to the more extreme manifestations, and in churches today it is usually the older women who are the most extraverted in the public expression of their spiritual experiences. McCall, a colonialist who took a fairly hostile view towards the revivals, describes a woman's expression thus:

Songs or prayers may accompany the early stages as the individual answering the call stands up in the chapel, among the congregation. Space is made, and the performer commences to move the feet and perhaps to give forth words. The tempo of the dance increases, the accompanying drum beats accelerate, the dancer, perhaps a woman or young girl, ever more energetic in her movements... all towards the final paroxysm of surrender, abandon, and dementia. (1949: 220)

On her return from furlough in 1931, Katie Hughes also noticed a significant change in behaviour during women's prayer meetings. She claims that where she once struggled to encourage the women to participate and express themselves, they now sang with 'so much fervour and willingness that she had no time to speak' (Thanzaupa, ed. 1997: 106). This is a very significant picture of liberation for women in musical participation. When we consider that *lengkhawm* is commonly traced back to the times of social singing and dancing between village elders who had gathered to drink *zu*, this represents another reversal in which the men

have now become more reticent in their participation, especially in modern church worship. This may be another remnant of the influence of 'Puma Zai', in which women were known to participate more than they had in earlier social dances. However, it may also be due to the long-standing institutional exclusion of women from church leadership, such that it is the men who have gained positions of authority, and it has become conventional that those in leadership do not as a rule participate in overt displays of spirituality. In this respect, Thanzauva explains that they are merely imitating the missionaries who accepted but did not personally engage with these spiritual manifestations:

Usually the menfolk did not dance in the past, and then particularly the elders and the pastors with the tie and suit they stand still and then either they sing soprano or bass or alto and then they don't usually move... And also you can see the church leaders trained by missionaries even now... Even if you push them they will not come forward.... They dress themselves like missionaries and stand a little bit reserved, but very committed. So there is no question about the commitment, but I don't know, they are too influenced by the missionaries! (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Thanzauva fails to note that there would also have been female missionaries present, who also would have displayed a similar reserve to their male counterparts. Perhaps they did not influence the behaviour of women in the same way because they were not seen to be church leaders. In any case, it can be seen that at least in the musical aspect of worship, women have increasingly found a liberating opportunity to express their spirituality in a deeply personal yet public way through participation in *lengkhawm*, yet at the same time there has been an apparently sudden decline in original compositions from women since the arrival of Christianity.

We also find interesting perceptions of gender difference in the roles that support the *lengkhawm* and the music of church services in general: instrumentalists, and especially the drummers, are exclusively male, while the song-proclaimer (see next chapter) is always female. Even in the choirs, which strive for an even split between male and female singers, the choir director is invariably male, despite the choir tradition stemming from the work of the female missionary Katie Hughes in the 1920's. My own experience as a female music teacher at AICS revealed much the same tendencies. My instrumental students were almost exclusively male<sup>69</sup>, as was the rota for the music group in the chapel, apart from the song-leading and

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<sup>69</sup> My female students were either non-Mizo, and evidently from a less segregated musical background, or missionaries, aware of the usefulness of musical skills in their work.

chanting role assigned to women. However, it was sometimes explained to me that this was not a rule, but just indicative of female reticence. Whenever I played piano with the musicians in the chapel I was welcomed and enjoyed the same insider rapport that inevitably develops within such a group of musicians with a shared musical vocabulary associated with the same repertoire. Even the song-proclaimer Jenny Zodinpuui narrated a story of a meeting she led in which the drummer was absent, so that she had to try to play it herself until he arrived (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012). It is therefore not unthinkable that Mizo women might eventually take part in the instrumental aspect of *lengkhawm*, but there seems to be a disinclination to do so on the part of women which is exacerbated by the lack of encouragement from men. Indeed, rather than adopting a distinctly feminist stance, we may equally enquire why men are rarely seen in the position of the song-proclaimer.

It is difficult to suggest reasons for these conventions because the instrumental traditions in church are a post-Christian development, as is the position of the song-proclaimer, but it does not seem to be an example of inequality or subjugation in this instance because both genders are limited to specific roles. Though the different roles might superficially indicate a continuation of the tradition of male leadership, it is possible that there are more complex and culturally subversive interactions that take place as a result of these conventional distinctions. Indeed, the fact that *lengkhawm* demands the live and dynamic interaction between the male drummer and the female song-proclaimer can actually indicate that in the area of music, the woman has just as significant a leadership role as the man, thus subverting the otherwise institutionalised acceptance of exclusive male leadership.

### 4.2.3 Sentimentality and Spirituality

A Lushai legend documented by Shakespear (1912: 383-384) associates the origin of music with the origin of sorcery. Towards the end of the story, members of the Thlanga sub-tribe discover a magic singing gourd in the forest. They break it open and each acquires 'knowledge of music.' Using this new knowledge they begin to cast spells and curses by 'chanting the magic song.' The connection between music and spirituality is, of course, not just a post-revival concept.

Tales of supernatural encounters, especially in the thick forests, have become a part of the Mizo literary heritage. The belief that spirits could take on anthropomorphic forms was related to the immanent nature of Pathian. There was a keen consciousness of interaction with the spirit world which later served to form the basis of the Mizo spiritual awareness that was characteristic especially in the fourth revival. Even in the modern Christian setting,

rumours of encounters with spirits, often malevolent, in human form, are not uncommon<sup>70</sup>. There is of course a framework within Christianity for articulating these experiences, but more often a dependence on traditional devices is preferred. After all, such language itself emerged from the jungle environment in which the experiences occurred, and naturally have a greater resonance than the often westernised conceptualisation of such phenomena in Christian discourse.

As the previous chapter highlighted, the idea of 'Mizo spirituality' is one that emerged during the revivals, yet its roots are found in experiences such as those described above, as well as the traditional singing and drinking nights of the village chiefs and elders. To David, the music secretary of AICS, the Mizo people have always been moved by music, and singing to the beat of the drum has always compelled them to dance on any occasion, as if the musical expression of their spirituality has not depended on a spiritual context (Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012). Similarly, Lalhlira claims that dancing 'has become an important feature of Mizo spirituality' (Chhungi 2008: 293).

Sentimentality, or *lunglen*, is not the shallow feeling implied by its English translation. Instead, as was explained in Chapter 2, it has been an important characteristic once reserved for the artists, composers and poets whose work was considered an outpouring of this sentiment. They were described as being of *lungleng thei tak*<sup>71</sup>. Now, since the revivals, the 'Mizo sentiment' can be possessed by anyone. A particularly sentimental person in this sense is *mi lungleng thei tak*, 'given to thoughts or feelings of devotion' (Lorrain 1940). It represents a susceptibility to being touched deeply, especially by the sound of a song or text. The Mizo sentiment and Mizo spirituality cannot be separated (as is indicated in the use of the word 'devotion' to explain *lunglen*), and they are joined together in a large part by music.

Some Christian composers continue to possess this distinctiveness, often identified by their production of songs which seem to some degree unfamiliar, as if they have been 'received'<sup>72</sup>. One of the most significant gospel composers of recent times is Rev. Killuaia, a retired minister who started composing songs to accompany his daily Bible studies at theological

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<sup>70</sup> For example, traditional belief held that a female spirit called 'Lasi' would sometimes appear to a lonely male worker in the jungle and seduce him. Her subsequent appearances to him constituted a relationship in which he was bound to be faithful to her. His connection with Lasi brought blessing upon his family, yet the bitter converse side of the situation lay in the threat of a family curse if he neglected her. Uncorroborated stories of such situations continue to be whispered today. Other stories of malevolent spiritual encounters involve the attacking of vehicles in specific areas.

<sup>71</sup> *Tak* is an optional emphatic adverbial in this case, equating to 'very'.

<sup>72</sup> This is an interesting area for further study. For existing work on the subject see Titon (1980), Nettl (2005), as well as Abrams (1953) for a similar study in the area of poetry.

college. Intense prayer has become increasingly important to him, and since his studies his songs have tended to emerge after long periods of prayer and fasting. He does not call himself a composer, but explains the process in these words:

While I was praying so much, you see sometime I pray 30 nights, 40 days without sleeping. Then, my eye also not affect, and my health also is not affect. While I am fasting, I am trying praying with fasting more than 40, more than 30, more than 20, my health is not affected. No. I pray and I pray so much. Then after that the song comes. Aw, the song comes. I am not a composer. I am not a song composer. When I have a deep prayer you see that song comes. (Interview: 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011)

Another important example is the Pentecostal composer Ma-Ena, who has composed a large number of songs which have recently been recorded and popularised by his niece Lalthansangi. He himself is relatively unknown, but it is his songs with their characteristic divinely-inspired elements that have made Lalthansangi and his songs so popular, even beyond the United Pentecostal Church denomination (UPC).



Figure 20: Still from music video for 'Min Hruai Leh Rawh', 4:07. Lalthansangi, in green, has just sung her last 'Amen', performing to a sea of dancing worshippers reflecting the *lengkhawm* style. The women's headscarves are unique to the UPC denomination.

Perhaps his most famous song is 'Min Hruai Leh Rawh,'<sup>73</sup> which appears on first hearing to be a conventional example of a contemporary gospel song that draws heavily from the *lengkhawm* tune as well as country music. However, in the final chorus one line is replaced with the words 'Heiden rial overlai, halleluia! Amen, amen, amen, amen, amen.' Apart from

<sup>73</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZoseqZ6lBQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZoseqZ6lBQ)

‘Halleluia’ and ‘Amen’, which are considered to be universals of Christian speech<sup>74</sup>, the rest defies translation. The accepted explanation for the line is that it is an example of speaking in tongues. This practice is first documented in the Bible<sup>75</sup> and has become a particularly common feature of worship in modern Pentecostal churches, formally known as ‘glossolalia’. It refers to speech which can either be of a language foreign to the speaker, or of a language that is not known to be spoken by any other people. Speaking in tongues is often considered to be spontaneous, demonstrating the feeling of being under the control of the Holy Spirit, but in this case the line actually seems to have come from the composer Ma-Ena himself at the moment of composition rather than from Lalthansangi:

LS: This song was composed by her uncle, Ma-Ena, from Lunglei, and he was really spiritual. And he composed quite a number of songs... When I first heard this song in Lunglei Venglai Conference, I felt it is quite touching; it’s quite a touching song because as I have said the tune is different... It talks about his spiritual life walking in this world in the midst of all these sufferings, oppressions, all these kinds of, this kind of world; it’s difficult to go on. So it talks about his spirituality. It goes on and this Heiden Rial is tongues.

JH: The Heiden Rial itself, those two words.

LS: Heiden Rial Overlai Halleluia. That is tongues. In the beginning when Ma-Ena composed he was not trying to insert those things. That sentences were not in his mind at all. So when he was writing the lyrics, so he received I don’t know, like he received the spirit and those words came out and he just wrote down... For the first time he composed the rest, and when he was about to finish writing the lyrics, so that very words, Heiden Rial Overlai, that came. He started that. (Interview with Elless Hruaitea: 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Elless<sup>76</sup> describes Ma-Ena as ‘really spiritual’, again reinforcing the way in which such composers may be understood to be contemporary examples of the traditional *mi lungleng thei tak*. However, this sentimentality is no longer limited to the compositional stage, and is now used to describe the emotion produced in the singers and hearers of appropriate songs. The terms *lunglen zai* (singing) and *lunglen hla* (song) both refer to a sentimental song that can bring about or express feelings associated with *lunglen*, but in the post-revival context they can particularly refer to hymns which Lorrain describes as ‘mournful or plaintive... such as produces longings for heaven’ (remarkably, this is from his dictionary definition, 1940). This

<sup>74</sup> In other words, they are used by all Christians regardless of their language.

<sup>75</sup> Acts 2.

<sup>76</sup> UPC Student, AICS.

directly corresponds to the pervading themes and also the musical sound of *lengkhawm zai*. What Lorrain's western ears described as the 'plaintive' sound of the *thluk*, analysed in the previous chapter, was well-suited to the melodic character of the tunes associated with *lunglen*. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of original Mizo compositions, especially in the *lengkhawm* style are dominated by themes of deep longing, especially for heaven, that resonate perfectly with the old *lunglen* sentiment. The song 'Ni tla ngai lo', which I have recorded in a gospel version with Michael VL Rema<sup>77</sup>, is a typical example. It was composed by Rev. S Lianruma in 1940, and the chorus and second verse in English are presented below:

Chorus: *I long for him, my joy, my all.*

*Sweeter is He, the God of love who cares,*

*I want him more than that city of gold,*

*He's for my weary soul a home of rest.*

Verse 2: *There is a place for me up there,*

*City of Zion, where there's no setting sun,*

*My heart is groaning, longing to be there,*

*The saints are dwelling there, in glory shine*<sup>78</sup>.

Advocating integrity in worship, Christou (2009: 68-69), writing from a conservative Anglican perspective, warns about the dangers of shallow 'feel-good' worship excess in the West. This is typified in much contemporary Christian music, whose dominance Christou feels is at the expense of other genres of worship and song which can be found in the biblical texts, especially the genre of lamentation. This situation is not absent from Northeast-Indian contexts, but there is a clear Mizo response to be found in their inherent cultural association between sentimentality and the theme of lamentation. In Mizo spirituality, what Christou might describe as 'feel-good' excess is a deeply important aspect of *lunglen*, which combines ecstatic joy with an outpouring of painful feelings, all of which are entwined in the one act of singing and dancing in *lengkhawm*. Even for the direct interpretation of lamentation as a mourning genre, we can find a Mizo response in the fact that funeral wakes consist of an entire night of the same *lengkhawm zai*, including manifestations in many cases of the same *lunglen* sentimentality as would be demonstrated in moments of the greatest joy at the Christmas *zaikhawm*. Lawmsanga (2010: 134) describes this in Mizo terms as the shift from *harhna*<sup>79</sup> to *hlimmai*<sup>80</sup> joy, a dialectic interaction between negative and positive forms of

<sup>77</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po7ZGy6\\_oKA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po7ZGy6_oKA)

<sup>78</sup> [www.reverbnation.com/artist/song\\_show\\_lyrics/6946389](http://www.reverbnation.com/artist/song_show_lyrics/6946389) Trans. KL Biakchungnunga.

<sup>79</sup> Meaning both 'revival' and 'liveliness'.

revivalist ecstasy, demonstrating the already inherent Mizo understanding of the complexity of spiritual emotions. Vanlalchhuanawma also uses these two terms, explaining that they both ‘denote not only a negative state of being awakened from slumbering... but more of a positive state of being energised’ (2006: 1). A parallel can be found in Harrison’s assessment of Southern Gospel music in which he identifies the importance of two behavioural extremes: ‘enthusiasm and despair’ (2008: 41). *Lengkhawm* embodies a multitude of emotions which make it a powerfully adaptable worship genre whether in regular Sunday worship, at Christmas *zaikhawm* celebrations or at funeral wakes. Returning to Vanlalchhuanawma, ‘it [revivalist joy] is the source of the dynamics of all aspects of Mizo Christian life’ (2006: 1).

Mitchell, like Christou, offers a critique of worship in the West in which he observes a ‘loss of symbolisation and over-verbalisation’ and advocates an openness to non-verbal worship (1999: 29). He exposes himself to the misconception that symbolisation must be non-verbal, but a balance between verbalised and non-verbalised worship can be observed in Mizoram. It has been achieved between the importance of the words, the tune and the act of singing in *lengkhawm zai*. Although the text is important, and appropriate songs must be chosen for the occasion by considering the text’s meaning, its value is counterbalanced by the other factors that contribute to the *lengkhawm*. The practice of repeating the same song continuously for an extended period of time (as described in the next chapter) serves to illustrate the way in which the act of singing and participating musically as a community in the expression of a song can be just as important as following the words of the text from the beginning of the song to its completion in the final stanza. Even when the verbal function of the song text has been expressed, the song and the singing of it can still constitute a deep part of the worship. In many cases, especially in the *lengkhawm zai*, it is the tune itself that especially touches the Mizo sentimentality, and often a particularly touching tune is more likely to provoke more repetitions of the song.

When asked ‘What do you understand by Mizo spirituality?’, my informants often responded in terms of music.

We put the name *lengkhawm zai* and this is according to my understanding... what I believe is this is God’s gift to the Mizo people... which is more suitable for our sentiments. That’s why through this *lengkhawm zai* according to my experience and my knowledge God revealed himself much more than, what to say, this western music.

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<sup>80</sup> Meaning ‘joy’.



That is why I always give importance to this. (Michael VL Rema<sup>81</sup>. Interview, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

I think God has a plan for every tribe and every caste, according to our own identity.... For us, the Mizo people, we receive the Mizo spirit.... When they took in those drums, they enjoy and their spirituality was developed and it was moving. It might be, even today, the western people used to come, but they might not enjoy as we enjoy here, because their way of worship is also different.... Since it is matching with our identity, with our traditional song, so it touches. Here we used to talk about spirituality regarding the songs. (Elless Hruaitea. Interview, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Elless is a member of the United Pentecostal Church in Mizoram. The UPC denomination was established in Mizoram by American missionaries in the 1950's, and they brought a ready acceptance of some of the more extreme manifestations of spirituality that had been prevalent in the fourth revival. Whereas the Baptist and Presbyterian churches had been perplexed by some of the behaviour, individuals who expressed themselves in this way found a spiritual home in Pentecostalism, in which such behaviour continues to dominate. Elless spoke about this situation:

So when the revival happened to the Mizo people many of the church leaders did not understand what happened to them, what kind of spirit do they have, so they are confusing! ...When they receive inside the church they just take them out and put them separately. Sometimes they took them to hospital, ok? That is not for them the medicine, but the medicine was singing. It's wonderful! If you experience, you would amaze! (Ibid)

As part of their spirituality described above, individuals often experience dreams and visions. Some visions that pre-date Christianity have also entered Mizo folklore<sup>82</sup>, but in Christian contexts this is sometimes a small word of prophetic knowledge which possesses someone, such as a rebuke for an individual or family within a community. Lott (1986: 2) has also identified 'illuminatory spirituality' to be a particularly common feature of tribal Christianity in South India. In the Christian context, the person who receives this message and hesitates might experience *tul*, a spiritual possession of his or her physical body such that they cannot behave normally until they have delivered the message. Unusually ecstatic behaviour especially during the dancing in *lengkhawm* can also be described as *tul*, and a person who is

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<sup>81</sup> Gospel singer and student, AICS.

<sup>82</sup> For example, several visions are recounted from the nineteenth century that apparently foretold the arrival of the missionaries. The most famous of these are those of Darphawka in 1882-1895, which Chawa wrote down by hand in a notebook for Lorrain in 1924, now held in the Angus Library, Oxford.

particularly susceptible to such experiences on a regular basis might be called *mihlim*, an ‘ecstatic person’.

*Lengkhawm* provides a suitable context for such experiences to take place, and can affect any participant, whether dancing or not. In the UPC tradition, this *tul* has an even deeper connection with song. If an individual is in such a position of having lost control over their physical body, for example if they are lying on the floor, then it can be expected that another person will receive the same spiritual blessing but in the form of a spontaneous song. This song is considered to be the direct complementary spiritual manifestation (or ‘medicine’) to the person experiencing *tul*, such that the song will eventually bring them back to their normal physical state. Elless describes this form of singing:

LS: So even the tune of the spiritual singing is different.

JH: From everything else?

LS: Yeah it’s different. The person who receives that singing cannot sing anytime, anywhere he likes or she likes, but only when the spirit gives, they could sing those songs. And no written words to be sung, or neither no readymade lyrics, but they just pray and they just sing, the tune, just coming. They just keeping on singing. [He is gesturing the drum beat]

JH: And you also drum? While they are singing you drum?

LS: Yeah sometimes. They can keep on singing and I heard one lady singing almost two hours nonstop. (Interview: 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

He describes the gift that some people might have of singing a song that has the power to revive individuals who are paralysed in a state of *tul*. Even in other denominations such songs have been known to be used to help individuals in such a state; these songs are called *hla pui*<sup>83</sup> and tend to be sung in an unknown spiritual language by all involved. *Hla pui* demonstrates the degree to which such spiritual utterances are so intrinsically connected with music and song in Mizo spirituality, to the extent that the Mizo term for speaking in tongues, *Tawnghriatloh* (‘unknown language’), tends to be reserved only for occasions of singing together in such a way (this can take place even outside the *lengkhawm* and *tul* contexts).

The songs of *lengkhawm* therefore not only possess the musical quality that evokes the Mizo sentiment of *lunglen*, but they also have a direct function in responding to manifestations of Mizo spirituality. The dancing and emotional outbursts that take place within the *lengkhawm*

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<sup>83</sup> However, this term, which literally just means ‘great song’, also has more general applications. For example, it can also refer to the theme song of a conference or assembly.

context are examples of this spirituality, but at a deeper level it is also the context in which states of *ṭul* are most often witnessed. *Lengkhawm* both provides an opportunity for *ṭul* to be experienced, but also provides the appropriate musical response in the form of *hla pui*. In its many diverse aspects, it is a worship genre that certainly unites the different traditional threads of Mizo sentiment and spirituality through music.

### 4.3 Summary

To what extent can *lengkhawm* be understood as traditionally Mizo? The second chapter showed that it was not a deliberately constructed tradition designed to reinforce Mizo identity, but a more organic genre that emerged almost in parallel with the gradual integration of Christianity into Mizo society. The third chapter highlighted the melodic and vocal character of *lengkhawm* and identified features that may indicate a direct stylistic relationship with songs of traditional Mizo society, even though we cannot be sure what these sounded like. It is therefore only in retrospect that we can deconstruct *lengkhawm* as a tradition in order to construct the possible bridges between traditional society that have ensured its deep significance, acceptance and longevity in the modern Christian context.

Even then, this chapter has already encountered the immediate problem that what is ‘Mizo’ today might not have been ‘Mizo’ at the turn of the last century. The term ‘Mizo’ itself is relatively modern, post-dating even the missionaries. But an understanding of traditional Mizo society has been so comprehensively articulated for modern Mizo people by influential church leaders such as Thanzauva and Vanlalchhuanawma that it has become possible to at least identify the relationship between *lengkhawm* and aspects of Mizo society that are popularly held to be ‘traditional’ today. With an emphasis on understanding what ‘traditional’ means to the Mizo people who practise *lengkhawm*, this chapter has successfully established *lengkhawm* as an embodiment of the traditional value of community, as a reinterpretation of traditional gender roles, and as an expressive outlet for traditional sentimentality and spirituality.

Though Hobsbawm dominates much literature about tradition, it is once again Ranger who proves to be more relevant to the Mizo context through his superbly-researched historical accounts of case studies in Africa. His biography of the Samkange family of Zimbabwe, *Are we not also men?* (1975) serves to illustrate some of the issues surrounding indigenous Christian traditions that are pertinent to *lengkhawm*. For example, echoing Thanzauva’s desire for communitarianism to be an integral feature of tribal theology, Ranger highlights Thompson Samkange’s realisation that the individualisation of western culture that seeped down into

missionary attitudes and structures did not have to be maintained for Christianity to be expressed in Zimbabwe. He goes as far as to say that individualism is a decidedly un-Christian trait, such that a tribal emphasis on community can be regarded as a truer expression of Christianity (Ibid: 72). This certainly parallels Thanzauva whose *Theology of Community* attempts to achieve this in the Northeast-Indian context (2004).

Thompson Samkange<sup>84</sup> also found that missionary attitudes to music actually threatened the very communities which were so important to him. With ritual musical practices having been banned (according to Ranger), and singing becoming increasingly limited to church services, Thompson passionately defended the social activity of all-night concerts which were enjoyed by the whole community but discouraged by the missionaries. Ranger cites his defence:

Since I have been in Ministry, I have never tried a case where the immorality took place at a concert... It is said that Concerts should be prohibited and that anybody holding a Concert prosecuted. I feel it would be an injustice. Africans have night dances as well as Europeans... Concert is the only social entertainment which the Christian Africans have as all native dances have been condemned as *heathen*... If those missionaries were to enforce their views upon those who think differently from them, they will have to prove it to some of us. I do not think it is fair to think that Africans though not quite civilised would organise a social entertainment which they know would result in moral lapses of their children. (Emphasis his. Cited in Ranger 1975: 80)

The similarity between these concerts and the *zaikhawm* is immediately apparent, despite the strikingly different attitudes of the missionaries. The superficially comparative observation that both traditions consist in singing all night as a community should not deter us from understanding the significance of the one to be relevant to the other. In Thompson's case, the concerts represented an opportunity to indulge in a community event whose music had a local appeal. Opportunities for such activities had become scarce since Christianity had been adopted. Moreover, the concerts offered a democratic arena for the enjoyment of music without the hierarchical and formalised structures of the church service. It is also apparent that, to Thompson, concerts had become a symbol of tradition in part because the actual 'native dances' had been prohibited. It is for these reasons that Thompson considered it to be so important to defend such events within the community.

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<sup>84</sup> His first name is applied here to avoid confusion with his sons Sketchley and Stanlake who also form an important part of Ranger's biography.

Although *lengkhawm* as a genre can also take place within the church service, it is at the *zaikhawm* that its role as a democratic and communitarian music of the local people becomes clearest. Although it has not had to be defended in the same way<sup>85</sup>, it serves a very similar cultural role to the Zimbabwean concerts of ensuring the survival of that deeply precious value: selfless egalitarian community spirit. Thompson's defence can therefore be transferred to support just how important *lengkhawm* as an embodiment of community is. As Lawmsanga asserts, 'its informality and spontaneity hold a special fascination for the Mizo public', by providing an 'open pulpit' and avoiding the inhibiting formality of the church service (2010: 182-3).

But we have demonstrated that *lengkhawm* not only preserves traditional values, but can also be seen to reinterpret some, most significantly in the area of gender roles. Gender inequality is still a contentious issue in Mizoram, as it is in western Christianity, but when we recognise the low status of women in traditional society, it is interesting to compare this with gender roles in *lengkhawm*, as a genre which is portrayed as traditional. We see that although men and women are not equals, each is limited to a different role: the men are instrumentalists and often more aloof, the women may chant and are generally more spiritually expressive. Whereas women used to compose traditional songs, it is mostly men who compose songs for *lengkhawm*. Does the discontinuity with traditional society in this respect negate the extent to which *lengkhawm* can be considered traditional?

Once again, we return to Ranger in Zimbabwe. Thompson and his contemporaries started a tradition of extending family roles of 'mother', 'father', 'child' to represent the relationships between each other, church leaders and missionaries, forming a close-knit and intimate network amongst many individuals and groups. Although these were applied to a relatively new hierarchy introduced by the missionaries and their Christianity, Ranger argues that the familial denotations were both 'a development out of the "traditional" African extended family' but also a 'specifically Methodist idiom' (1975: 37). Thus, although adapted and integrated into a new context, the practice was locally regarded to be still 'traditional'. Likewise, the altered gender roles in *lengkhawm* reflect those instituted by the new Christian Church, but continue to reflect the 'traditional' awareness of gender difference. It is perhaps more helpful to

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<sup>85</sup> The publication by the North Lushai Assembly Committee of the *Harhna Hruaina* ('Revival Manual') in 1949 strongly discouraged many of the features that continue to appear occasionally during *lengkhawm*, including receiving divine messages, lying on the floor and adopting mimetic dance postures. Dance was declared to be acceptable only for 'immature' Christians. However, the prevalence of *lengkhawm* today would suggest that it was largely ignored, although it is interesting to note that a revival of the same scale and significance as those that took place before 1949 has not been witnessed since.

recognise the subversion of traditional expectations and roles that takes place within *lengkhawm*, in which every musical participant behaves sacrificially in a way that negates some of the power which their role would be expected to possess. Therefore it is not the role itself that represents status, but the way in which it is handled cooperatively and with modesty that distinguishes the quality of the participant. With this in mind, the distinctions between different gender roles becomes a much smaller issue within the wider context of the embodiment of traditional community values through the practice of *lengkhawm*.

The male drummer, for example, holds the greatest power, but is subject to the song suggestions of others. The repetitions are determined not by him but by the female song-proclaimer who has arrived after the *lengkhawm* has begun but who assumes a role that affects the spiritual atmosphere and timing of the singing almost as much as the drummer. The man who plays the smaller drum might seem to be offering a mere accompaniment, but it is his sub-beats which can affect the tempo of the song and determine the rate of its acceleration. Ultimately, each depends on the others to produce an effective *lengkhawm*, not just in the fulfilment of their own roles but in the influence they hold over each other and the concessions they are forced to make, resulting in a situation in which the united effort of the musicians avoids the 'excesses' which were cited as a problem during revivalist worship in which one drummer held complete control over the mood of the *lengkhawm*. Such situations contradicted the importance of community effort, and this is an issue that seems to have found resolution in the current emphasis on co-operation and interaction.

Finally, it is clearly in the area of Mizo spirituality and sentiment that *lengkhawm* proves to embody what is widely-regarded as a deeply traditional character. Here, at least, it is perhaps easier to identify *lengkhawm* as traditional because, to borrow common phraseology, it touches the Mizo sentiment more than other music. It may seem far-fetched to claim something to be traditional just because it is more touching or because it has greater aesthetic resonance. However, a Mizo gospel singer, Michael VL Rema, distinguishes *lengkhawm* from contemporary worship genres by doing just that:

MR: That is why I always put the first in this *lengkhawm zai*, in Mizo spirituality. Because whenever we have revival, spiritual revival let's say, God used this *lengkhawm zai* as an instrument. Yes. That's why I always put first. This is the Mizo spirituality, is in *lengkhawm zai*.

JH: That's where it is. And is there any little bit of Mizo spirituality in the contemporary songs you sing? In the gospel songs? Is there any element there of Mizo spirituality do you think?

MR: ...In our today context it might be, because some young peoples are not much interesting in this, so to say, in this Mizo music. But not many of them, some few of them, they are influenced with this western music, rock, pop, like alternative and contemporary and other kinds of music genre. ...As I say before, maybe I contradict myself but according to my understanding *there is an era for any kinds of music, but it will not last long*. Sometimes those Hillsongs, you know? Those praise and worship, that Darlene Zschech and all, her party, they are very famous and popular all over the Mizo young people. They imitate their music and the way they dance and action songs like that but they cannot go further. There is a limit. And after that, some rock music is coming out again, and with that, with that rock music they compose in gospel songs also, but they are not much influenced for a long time. For a time being only, for a short time only. That's why I, according to my understanding *the most reliable and lasting is that, for Mizo spirituality is this, let me get back in this lengkhawm zai*. (Emphasis mine. Interview, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

In Michael's view, *lengkhawm* is 'the most reliable and lasting' form of worship that can embody Mizo spirituality. Other styles may supersede it in popularity, but their value is short-lived and lacks the deep spiritual connection. Of Merriam's often-cited 'functions' of music, its contribution to the 'continuity and stability of culture' is perhaps most relevant here, and Merriam highlights its 'emotional expression' and ability to 'entertain and communicate' as the most important factors in achieving this function (1964: 225). The three areas discussed in this chapter correlate well with his theory: As *lengkhawm* reinforces community, it 'entertains'. In its gender distinctions it 'communicates' a change in attitude as well as a continuity in the notion of gender difference. In its emphasis on spirituality and sentimentality, 'emotional expression' is clearly an important part of *lengkhawm*. It can therefore be understood that the genre presents itself as a model, illustrating the way in which music can successfully contribute to the 'continuity and stability' of a changing Mizo culture.

When we consider the initial suggestion of this chapter that the current understanding of Mizo traditional society coincided with the adoption of Christianity by the majority of the Mizo people, we can further understand that *lengkhawm*, which also dates from this period, not only contributes to the 'continuity and stability' of Mizo tradition but actively constructs it. Mizo tradition in the Christian era is formed and embodied whenever *lengkhawm* is practised, not just because of its apparent continuity with a former way of life but because of its actual origin in the historical moment which defines the Mizo society as it exists today: the introduction of Christianity.

## 5. A Modern Tradition: *Lengkhawm* Today

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*Lengkhawm* has so far been established historically, analysed musically, and positioned culturally as an important worship genre that embodies many aspects of traditional Mizo society. From the outset, this thesis has described *lengkhawm* as modern, both because of its relatively young age and also because it belongs to Mizoram's modern Christian era. But how has *lengkhawm* as a tradition responded to subsequent influences from contact with other musical cultures? What role does *lengkhawm* play in modern Mizo worship, and how does this inform our understanding of the relationship between modernity and tradition?

In her overview of the diverse musical traditions of Fiji, Finnegan criticises the false dichotomy that is often constructed between 'tradition' and 'modernity' (2011: 135-149). Such an approach sets tradition firmly in the past, which, as we have seen, is often an unhelpful way in which to study worship traditions which are of recent origin and which form a part of current practice, such as *lengkhawm*. Indeed, Finnegan's Fijian case study illustrates a very similar situation in which the significance of cross-cultural contact has been secondary to the 'weight attached to musical forms that had come to symbolize a continuity with past tradition and present identity.' Methodist hymns, Indian classical music and nineteenth-century 'native' genres such as *meke* are all 'entrenched' in Fijian society, both because of, and in spite of, their role in Fiji's culturally-diverse history.

It must be acknowledged that *lengkhawm* as it is practised today does not necessarily represent an unchanged tradition preserved from the 1930's. Indeed my analysis and personal knowledge of *lengkhawm* has inevitably been grounded in my experience of *lengkhawm* as it has been practised recently, in 2011 and 2012. This chapter therefore presents a fuller picture of *lengkhawm* as it is practised in modern times, although many of the descriptions may be equally applicable to its historical character. It is an ethnographic account of the other elements of *lengkhawm* which still characterise it today, including the dance, the chanting and the instruments, which all demonstrate to varying degrees a role in establishing that same 'continuity with past tradition and present identity.' It will also conclude with a final study addressing the relationship between the *zaikhawm* context and the mass media.

### 5.1 *Lengkhawm* in Context

The discussion draws heavily from personal observation of Baptist church services. Although I am satisfied that the pattern is similar in other denominations, the study must at this point be limited to the Baptist denomination. We will begin with two contextual descriptions which



contrast the worship in a church service with the *zaikhawm* event. These are based on what I observed to be typical throughout my numerous experiences. They serve to place *lengkhawm* in its most common contexts, and the features described will be discussed separately in greater detail: the instrumentalists, the song-proclaimer and the dancing.



**Figure 21:** Sunday morning worship at Ramhlun South Baptist Church, showing two drummers, *hlahriltu* (with microphone) and pianist (Photo: RL Hnuni; author's camera)

### 5.1.1 *Lengkhawm* Upstairs: The Church Service

The main church hall (see Figure 22) is on the top floor, and other meeting rooms extend below as far as the steep mountainside permits. Women are sitting on the right and men on the left, due to the preference of this congregation. The children are sitting at the front, on the far right. The side-facing seating on the dais is reserved for the deacons, elders and special visitors. The choir is also sitting together, across the central row of seats towards the front. Behind the pulpit sits the preacher, and the 'worship leader' sits at the desk in front of the pulpit. His role is to announce each element of the service, and to introduce the preacher as well as any notable visitors. He will also announce the songs, invariably with the bi-lingual phrase: 'Kristian Hla Bu number...' before stating the number in Mizo. In fact, few members of the congregation have brought their books except the musicians for reference; the songs are known well.

The service begins at 10:30 a.m., but one of the drummers has arrived in advance. He sits behind the *khuangpui* on the front row. When there are a few people seated, he spontaneously begins a song. First he sets the tempo with two or three beats on the side of the drum; he then sets the key by beginning the song himself with no other accompaniment. He keeps beating. Provided that the key and tempo are appropriate, the few members of the congregation feel free to join in the song after the first few bars.

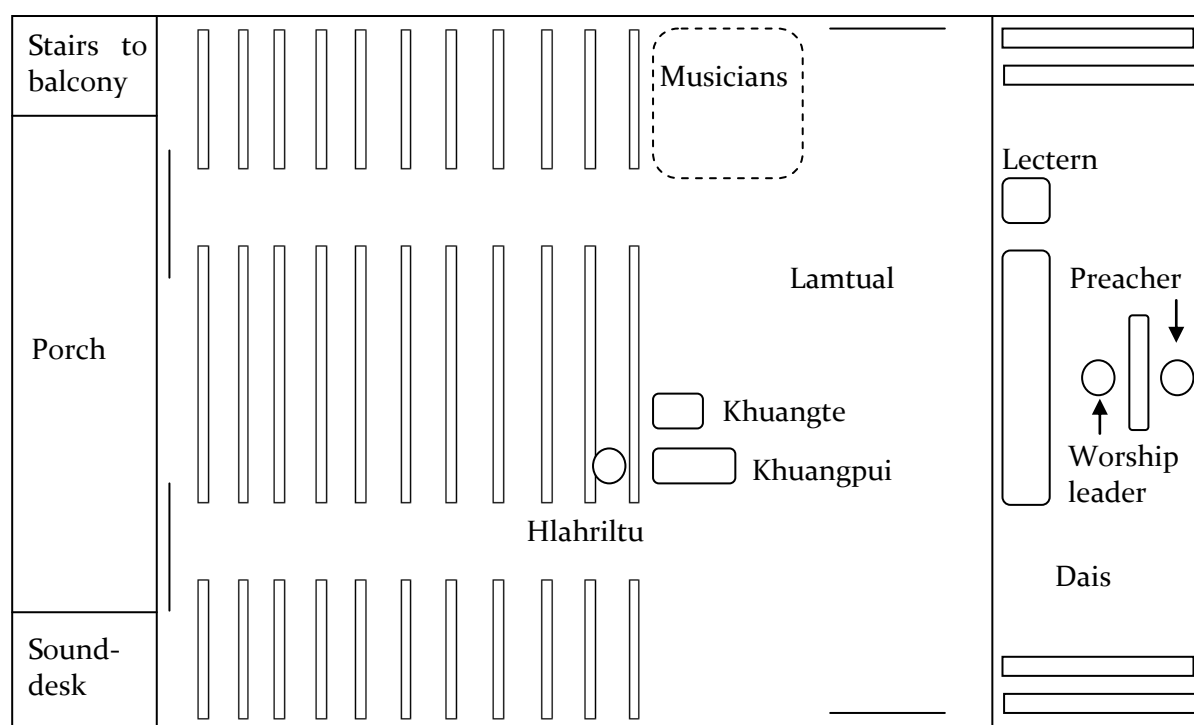


Figure 22: Typical Church Plan, loosely modelled on Ramhlun South Baptist Church in Figure 21

Eventually some of the other musicians arrive. The other drummer takes his place at the smaller *khuangte* and provides two beats to every one beat of the *khuangpui*. The keyboard-player and guitarists start to set up their equipment, liaising with the sound-desk at the back of the church, and when they are ready they will also begin to accompany the singing. One young lady who is used to leading the songs chooses to sit on the row behind them. If the congregation has grown she will start to chant the next line of the song before it is sung. She is the *hlahriltu*: 'song-proclaimer'. Eventually somebody from the sound-desk will equip her with a microphone.

Two or three songs are sung in this way before the service begins. The drummer of the *khuangpui* is in complete control at this point, still setting the tempo and the key. He is open to song suggestions from anyone sitting nearby. A few of the older women are dancing at the front. On special occasions such as assemblies, ordinations, fellowships with multiple

churches and inaugurations, we are much more likely to see crowds of people dancing in concentric anticlockwise circles in the space set aside at the front of the church: the *lamtual* ('dancing-area'). These occasions will also replace the lonely *hlahriltu* with a group of four song-leaders, two male and two female, who together lead from the dais, with standing microphones. Even in these instances, one of the women will take the lead by chanting.

The congregation has arrived, and the service begins. Power now transfers from the drummer to the worship leader behind the desk, but his is only a short introduction before selecting the opening song of the service. Despite the presence of other instrumentalists and singers, the drummer still beats and sings the first bar alone. If a song is sung in *lengkhawm* style, with the two drums and the distinctive tune, some people will be moved to dance at the front. However, most songs during the service are of the *sol-fa zai* genre, during which most people will remain standing in their places.

The first half of the church service contains a report from the church secretary, as well as prayers, Bible readings and the offering. These items will be interspersed with more songs following the same pattern as described above, and most services will also feature at least one 'special number' from the choir. The choir and its leader have been drawn from the youth fellowship (under 40's) and have been rehearsing twice weekly. They stand in two rows, the men behind the women, facing the congregation. They sing a well-known song in four parts to a pre-recorded backing track.

The second half of the service consists almost entirely of the sermon, lasting about 40 minutes. Throughout the service, but especially during the sermon, short spontaneous outbursts will be heard from some members, often the senior women of the church. 'Halleluia', 'Amen', or a combination, 'Halleluia Amen', are uttered and almost sung with a distinctive tune and expressiveness. A song that has been especially touching might also be followed by a short chorus of such outbursts by several members of the congregation, especially from those that have been dancing.

By now the time might be approaching 12 noon. The preacher finishes and all that remains is a closing song and benediction. This song will have been selected in advance, but if the preacher or worship leader feels particularly inspired to do so, they might choose an alternative song, or even repeat one that was sung earlier.

The service has finished, and the congregation files away to a courtyard outside or to a meeting hall under the church, where tea and perhaps cake is being served. The people mingle, and some go home for a quick tea break of their own. Meanwhile, the choir can be

heard practising in the church building. Most people are back inside by 1 p.m., ready for Sunday School.

### 5.1.2 *Lengkhawm* Downstairs: The *Zaikhawm*

It is 7:30 p.m. on a December evening. The women are wearing plain-coloured *puan*<sup>86</sup> and everyone is wrapped up warm in jumpers, traditional shawls, and thick socks. Once upon a time we would have been meeting in somebody's home, but downstairs church halls have been found to be more convenient for larger congregations. The room is dimly lit. A makeshift arrangement of low wooden benches frames a *lamtual*. The drummers are ready for a long night of playing, and there are other instrumentalists nearby, ready to provide a supporting role.



Figure 23: Afternoon *zaikhawm* at Zotlang Baptist Church, Lunglei, 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011 (Photo: Author)

The initial turnout doesn't look promising but the drummer makes a start regardless, his slow beat and distinctive bellow of the first line being followed by a reassuring entry from those present. If he has chosen well (the song, the key and the tempo), a few individuals might start dancing straightaway; otherwise it will take a couple of songs for the atmosphere to settle. Soon the *hlahriltu* will arrive; her chanting will inject the extra energy that is needed. Men, women and children are leaving their uncomfortable benches to join the concentric anticlockwise dancing. They shuffle in time to the beat of the *khuangpui*, their eyes shut and

<sup>86</sup> On Sunday mornings, women wear their finest colourful woven skirts (*puan*)

arms uplifted. Most of those not dancing remain seated, sometimes making the same gestures as the others while singing. A few will stand in their places.

Before you know it, the room has filled with a variety of people. The men and women are mingled. A few of the young children sit together on a front row, giggling, encouraging each other to join in. The young ladies are sitting in a corner, huddled in tight rows for warmth. After one or two songs, somebody, perhaps a church deacon, gives a short welcome and prayer. The singing continues; the drummer selects songs based on suggestions he hears from his neighbours, or requests from those lingering on the *lamtual* at the end of a song. Most people head straight back to their seats after each song, even if they intend to dance during the next. Songs are repeated several times at the discretion of the *hlahriltu*, and the tempo increases over the ten minutes during which the song is sung.

Occasionally an individual will get up to speak, or go to the small lectern. He or she might share something that they feel has burdened their hearts during the worship time, or it might be a word of encouragement for the worshippers. They might draw from a Bible passage, or an experience from their lives, or they might offer a public prayer. After sharing, they will return to their seats, often ending with a request for the next song.

After perhaps one hour or more, somebody suggests a tea-break. The young adults have been busy preparing it the whole time. They are on a rota for the Christmas season. Everyone remains seated while they carry trays of teas in little stainless steel cups to each row, catering for every preference. There might even be *chow* (noodles) or cake and biscuits. During the tea-break there is more opportunity for individuals to give a 'short sharing'; anyone is welcome to speak. At this point somebody might make special mention giving thanks to the musicians and all who have helped behind the scenes, as well as welcoming new guests.

During the revivals the *zaikhawm* would have lasted all night, but today we draw to a close at around 9:30 p.m. Everybody is encouraged to stand for the final song, and together the Lord's Prayer is recited (in Mizo), marking the end of the night. You make plans to attend again tomorrow evening, although the next day you wake up to the sound of drums and singing early in the morning, and you hear them again in the afternoon. Somehow, as you listen, you feel like you are missing out. With the exception of the change in location, the words of the missionary Katie Hughes, written in 1945, could still be written today:

As I write, strains of music with drum accompaniment reach my ears. It is New Year week and the Lushais are still celebrating. They started on Christmas Eve and have not finished yet. They gather together in each other's houses to sing hymns, praising

God for his protection over them. Undoubtedly the Christian religion has entered deeply into their hearts - it is their life. (Thanauva, ed. 1997: 175)

## 5.2 Past Tradition and Present Identity

We cannot ignore statements by Mizo scholars that globalisation is taking place in Northeast India. Zama (2006: 16) says that 'globalisation... is more prominent in the other Northeast States... where the modern music is completely westernised and the bands are an almost inseparable part of the urban life.' Vanlaltlani's complaint (2007: 90) strikes closer to home, claiming that the modern Mizo worship service has become an 'appendix to westernisation.' The vast issue of globalisation would be impossible to adequately address here, and I hasten to suggest that the use of the term by the above writers is somewhat mis-placed. Their concerns relate more closely to the issues of modernity addressed in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis. The following analyses may serve as a response to Vanlaltlani, as we reflect upon the 'modern Mizo worship service' described above. Our focus is on *lengkhawm*, and its role as a tradition within a modernised Christian context. The relationship between tradition and modernity as embodied in the current practice of *lengkhawm* can be demonstrated to be deserving of greater recognition than simply as an appendix to westernisation.

Nettl's compatibility theory (1978: 134) is strongly influenced by Waterman's similarity theory (1952). He distinguishes between westernisation (change occurs despite low compatibility), modernisation (some compatibility leads to new versions of the original) and syncretism (high compatibility). The language of compatibility has helpfully informed the discussions of Chapters 3 and 4. We have shown that elements of the western hymns were already well-suited to the more traditional tunes, such that they continue to feature in *lengkhawm zai*. However, their presence indicates not only what has been retained from western hymns, but also suggests some of the possible characteristics of traditional songs which first made the music of the missionaries acceptable. Understanding the process in terms of compatibility therefore emphasises the importance of both the traditional and the foreign musical traditions in forming an indigenous modern tradition such as *lengkhawm*.

The importance of pre-Christian traditions in understanding *lengkhawm* extends beyond music. It is, after all, a genre of worship in which the singing, *lengkhawm zai*, only forms a part. This was addressed in Chapter 4, highlighting certain aspects of traditional society which are embodied and reinterpreted in *lengkhawm*. In particular, the tribal significance of community (in Mizoram, epitomised in the ethic of *tlawmngaihna*) and the notion of Mizo spirituality and sentimentality are crucial to the accurate identification of *lengkhawm* as a

traditionally-rooted genre. But this relationship is complementary, as *lengkhawm*'s currency as a contemporary tradition serves to recontextualise and maintain the relevance of these traditional values in modern society. In the light of Nettl's approach, we can also see that *lengkhawm* has proven to be compatible with the society out of which it emerged, but that it has also successfully adapted to modernisations so that it has remained compatible in today's worship context.

The following discussion highlights the aspects of *lengkhawm* which have evidently responded to modernity and those which have resisted change. Furthermore, we also demonstrate that other aspects have crossed over into more modern styles and genres of worship, contributing to a process of modernisation without apparently losing its own identity as a Mizo worship tradition. This is because it has often been the medium and context rather than just the musical sound that has been adopted, serving to sustain *lengkhawm* and the *zaikhawm* worship context into the twenty-first century.

### 5.2.1 The Instrumentalists

A proverb, 'khuang lova chai ang', meaning 'like dancing without a drum', is used to describe something that has been conducted without proper organisation (Lalpekhluwa 2007: 195). It seems doomed to fail. Likewise, Lawmsanga (2010: 102) refers to the adage that worship without a drum is 'like food without salt'<sup>87</sup>. Since its introduction to the church in 1919, the *khuang* quickly became an indispensable part of Christian worship, and as illustrated above it continues to take control of the singing and dancing in church. It was not without initial resistance, especially from some village chiefs who realised that it would attract even more people into the churches (Lawmsanga 2010: 162). Kipgen (1997: 273) also considers the concern that the drummer could have too much power over the worshippers, as the sound is so mesmeric. The missionary Chapman (1968: 117) on the other hand recognised the importance of the drum, arguing that 'people emerging from animism needed dancing.' Its different appearance from the barrel-shaped drum of some traditional dances was highlighted in Chapter 2. The innovative nature of the drum itself is rarely admitted, but it does not seem to have been lifted unchanged from former traditions. Vanlalchhuanawma even observes that the simple beating pattern was different, claiming that in four beats of music only the first three would be beaten with the drum, creating a hiatus on every fourth beat (2006: 291).

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<sup>87</sup> In Mizoram, 'food' means rice.





Figure 24: The *khuangpui*, AICS Chapel. (Photo: Author)

Nevertheless, the drum is cited as a triumph for traditional Mizo music and its use in church was recognised as ‘traditional’ remarkably quickly. Commenting on the Lushai choir’s North India tour of 1933, directed by Katie Hughes, Williams writes that the songs were ‘sung to the accompaniment of the drum, as in their homeland’ (Thanzauva, ed. 1997: 117). This indication that singing to the drum was considered to be the normal pattern of worship for Mizo churches as early as 1933 demonstrates the quick establishment of this tradition.

Now every church is equipped with a *khuangpui* and smaller *khuangte*. As Pachuau (2002: 131) claims, the paired drums are the ‘hallmark of Mizo Christianity.’ Both drums are cylindrical, with skin on either side (see illustration) whose diameters are between one and two times the distance between the skins. They are increasingly given elaborate wooden cases which seek to suspend them in such a way as to maximise the sound. This is a development from an apparently hanging contraption described by Mrs Angus in 1932:

Strung from the rafters is a big drum, which is used to keep time in the hymns, usually with a small drum as well. (Handwritten report: 21)



The paired drums (*khuang pahni*) are reserved for the *lengkhawm zai*, including the singing of original unharmonised Mizo compositions or *sol-fa zai* which are being sung in a *lengkhawm* style (see Chapter 3). Any other style of song is accompanied only by the large drum. This is perhaps surprising when we consider that in traditional Mizo song and dance only one drum would ever have been used at one time. My speculation would be that a second drummer beating a sub-beat makes the tempo acceleration, which generally only happens in *lengkhawm zai*, easier to follow.

This acceleration is an important feature in *lengkhawm zai*. I have tracked the tempo changes by beat and by verse of a sample of songs and have been able to confirm the precise way in which this takes place. Figure 25 is one example which demonstrates the gradual acceleration during the early verses, beginning very slow before maintaining a steadier quick tempo for seven verses. Other examples can be founded in Appendix D, all of which correspond to an initial acceleration from about 60 beats per minute during the first verse, and settling between 75 and 80 b.p.m. for the remaining verses. They can be compared with the *sol-fa zai* recording of 'For Christ and the Church' in Figure 26, which has a much more consistent tempo, and which actually begins slightly faster than the tempo at which it settles.

The drums only play single beats (*khuangpui*) and half beats (*khuangte*). Sometimes the drummer of the *khuangpui* will also include a few subdivisions to match the *khuangte*, especially at the transition between verses or if he is trying to direct a tempo acceleration. Beyond these subdivisions, no other rhythmic variation is given. The introduction of a native drum in church worship has been widely documented in other places, especially in Africa, and Farhadian (2007: 120, 57) identifies that it often seems to have a 'spiritual power' that can cross religious boundaries very easily if it is permitted to do so. Often the drum is used in the traditional way even to accompany apparently incongruous western melodies and harmonies. Nettl (1955: 107) has observed this in the genre of popular music amongst the Ibo people in Nigeria in which African rhythms are superimposed upon western melodies.

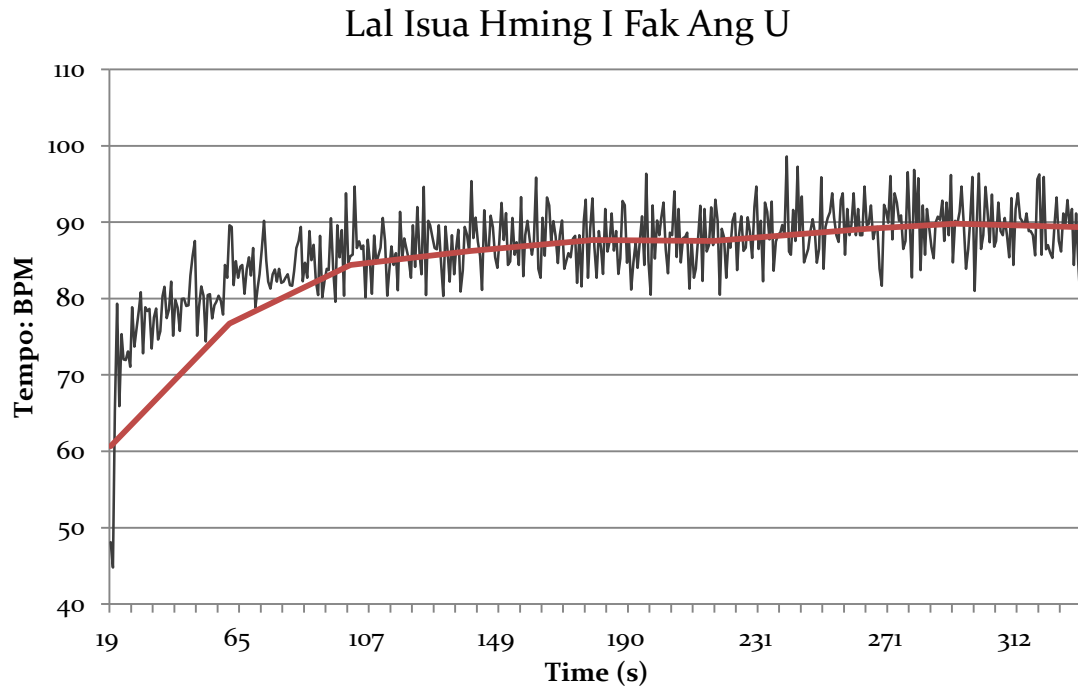


Figure 25: *Lengkhawm zai* performance of 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name': 18<sup>th</sup> December 2011, Ramhlun South Baptist Church

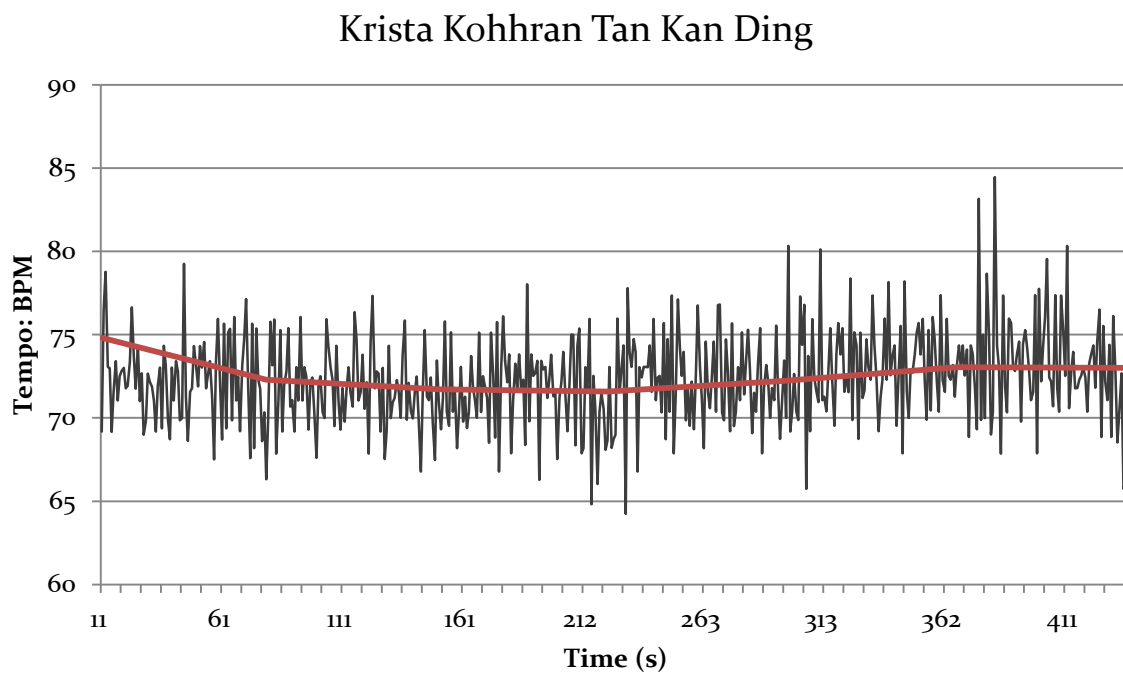


Figure 26: 'Krista, Kohhran Tan'

Although this process can technically be called 'hybridization' (1953: 237), Nettle prefers the term 'Africanized' because the music produced constitutes a new genre which has a decidedly African sound; the drums and rhythms tend to dominate one's perception of the music. The term also emphasises that the African 'ownership' of the genre continues to be of utmost importance despite the clear western influences and borrowings. Following Nettle, we could

therefore describe the process of applying the Mizo drum to all church singing, whether western or Mizo in style, as ‘Mizo-ization’ and this has seen further developments in recent decades with the introduction of western band instruments in many churches such as the guitar (electric, acoustic and bass), drum-kit (more often a synthesised drum-pad) and keyboard.

The permanent presence of the drum in all church singing and at the *zaikhawm* represents a certain continuity with *lengkhawm*’s origins, and its application to other styles of songs legitimises it as an instrument with contemporary importance despite the use of other band instruments. The very fact that the drum has been able to cross over into more modern songs and that the new instruments have themselves been introduced into *lengkhawm zai* without much apparent controversy has helped to minimise the potential divide between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ musical styles in church. Though the roles differ, the instrumentation can be identical in both contexts, so that the relevance of *lengkhawm* can be demonstrated to be both adaptable and continuous.

These newer instruments were not introduced by the first missionaries, and almost certainly post-date the emergence of *lengkhawm*, at least in their regular use in churches. It must be remembered that the missionaries of this era would have come from churches in which the only instrument used to accompany singing would have been an organ or piano. Thus the use of the guitar and keyboard in church may have seemed almost as much of a Mizo innovation as the drum.

The keyboard is usually a 61-76 key instrument, although it will often be seen in an ornate wooden casing which gives it a grand appearance similar to a harmonium (see Figure 21). On Michael VL Rema’s gospel recording ‘Khaw Lo La Awm Tur’, for example, the piano featured in the video is actually an electronic keyboard inside a replica baby grand piano casing. In modern times it is common to hear the assertion that every Mizo can at least play the basic chords on a guitar or piano, but since these early days, opportunities to study instrumental technique have continued to be scarce. Musical talent still tends to be the product of intensive personal dedication to self-teaching and practice. A former music secretary at AICS shares his own early commitment to learning to play the keyboard:

One of our youth leaders, he was kind enough to teach me that keyboard, so every night I visited him and he offered me the church keyboard, ‘we have the church keyboard’ and he’s the keyboardist. He was the keyboardist and he put in his house so I played every night. Sometimes almost four in the morning, so I

was really trying hard to play. (Lalmuanawma Renthlei. Interview: 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2012)

This dedication is by no means typical, but Lalmuanawma is an exceptional church musician and this serves to demonstrate what is required to reach the highest standards where formal educational opportunities are limited<sup>88</sup>. As a result, the role of the band instruments in church has emerged into a rather limited rhythmic accompaniment generated through the playing of chords. Their role is always subordinate to the paired drums and rarely adds harmonic depth. The guitar and keyboard especially share an emphasis on the rhythmic playing of simple chords, or as Michael puts it, ‘no hard chords’, especially in *lengkhawm zai* (Interview, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012). Elless calls this the ‘*Thing-Dup*’ style of playing, an onomatopoeic term that accurately describes the down-up chordal playing of the guitar and the left hand-right hand repetition of triadic chords on the piano (Interview, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012). It is possible that the Indian style of playing which Clayton describes as ‘up-plucking’ (2009: 183) may also refer to a similar style. A similar phrase describes the binary rhythm of the two drums, ‘*Tlawng-Dung*’, according to Lalmuanawma<sup>89</sup>. Interestingly, this literally means ‘Tlawng length’, where Tlawng is the longest river in Mizoram. Thus the words have both an onomatopoeic but also a local significance, referring to the geographical environment.

The guitar was a relatively recent introduction, with the village of Thingsai for example first encountering the instrument in February 1946<sup>90</sup>, although it is unlikely that it was used in church until much later when the radio started broadcasting the praise and worship songs of the Gaithers. It was given the name *tingtang*, the name that had previously belonged to the now obsolete bowed instrument made of gourd, bamboo, skin and string (Lalrinawma 2005: 47). Similarly the guitar is sometimes claimed to be a descendant of the *kachhap vina* in other parts of India, illustrating the way in which it can be claimed as a local instrument (Clayton 2001: 185), regarded as a modernised version of a traditional instrument.

It would seem that the local nomenclature immediately assimilated the guitar firmly into the Mizo music tradition; it was not perceived to be a foreign instrument, despite being plucked and strummed unlike its bowed predecessor. Particularly mediated through the broadcasting

<sup>88</sup> Contrary to the rapid growth of a keyboard education industry documented in southeast Asia by Wong (2009), Aizawl only has a handful of commercial music schools and there is only one such place to my knowledge in Lunglei. Though there is probably a demand that might merit the ventures documented by Wong, the facilities and opportunities are not yet available such that education remains largely based in the church.

<sup>89</sup> Personal communication with Lalmuanawma Renthlei.

<sup>90</sup> Personal communication with Rev. Lalthangliana Hnamte, a composer whose father, H. Hrangkaia, introduced the instrument to the village. This was the same village which pioneered the use of the drum in 1919.

of bands such as the Beatles on All India Radio, the guitar gained extremely rapid popularity. Mizo bands consisting exclusively of three guitarists and singers were among the first to gain fame through local radio, as well as making their name at least in other parts of Northeast India. The pioneering female soloist Lalsangzuali Sailo often collaborated with such bands at the early stage of her career in 1967-1975. She represents a rare instance of a Mizo musician gaining widespread Indian appreciation, as she received the Padma Shri for Literature in 1998.

Mizo guitar playing has occasionally caught the attention of scholars in other parts of India. Clayton draws on conversations in Delhi with Kennedy Hlychho from Mizoram<sup>91</sup> to explore the way in which the guitar can be understood as a local instrument (2009: 65). Many Mizo students learnt guitar not from missionaries but from their encounters with musicians in cities such as Shillong in Assam, which was for a long time the nearest possible place to continue education beyond high school. Most crucially however, Clayton elsewhere describes the important role of the guitar amongst minority Christian communities in India (2001: 181) in their sense of local community identity. The Mizo people are by contrast a majority, even exclusive Christian community, and have no need to use the guitar to assert their identity, yet perhaps the connections between the Mizo attitude to the guitar and its reception by Christians elsewhere in India may support the idea that its value has much less to do with being a western instrument, and much more to do with its national and local significance.

It is interesting to observe the way in which the guitar was first embraced in Mizoram as a modernised *tingtang*, yet its popularity was largely due to the exposure to western popular music on the radio. It is difficult to separate the traditional and modern or westernised significance of the guitar, even more so now because after decades of enjoying an important role in the growth of Mizo gospel and popular music (*lengzem zai*: 'love songs'), it has subsequently entered the sacred tradition of Mizo church worship. Like many denominations in the West, few churches are without a guitar, and this symbol of modernised tradition as a response to secular and western musical influence has now come to be integrated in a very different earlier product of a similar process: *lengkhawm zai*.

### 5.2.2 The *Hlahriltu*

Singing can begin without her, but it can rarely continue without her. In the absence of a *hlahriltu*, one or two members of the congregation might take it upon themselves to proclaim the next lines of a song in a similar style. The process can be heard on all the recordings on the

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<sup>91</sup> Actually, from his name we can know that he is of the Hmar sub-tribe from northern Mizoram.

DVD, and one transcribed example is given below in Example 14. Jenny Zodinpuui summarises the basic procedure:

When they [the congregation] sing the first line, 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin', they nearly finish the line. And in that time we [the *hlahriltu*] have to start. 'A lo kal sualna...' We have to be very careful because of the *khuang*. We have to think about that *khuang* also. The beat. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

What purpose does she fulfil? Although the hymnal is an important resource for the worship leader and the musicians, and although most individuals own a copy, members of the congregation rarely bring them to church. Books inhibit the hands which would otherwise want to be expressive, either clapping or uplifted, whether dancing or standing. It would be easy to conclude that her function is simply to dictate the words to a congregation who have dispensed with their hymnals.

The musical score is written for two parts: Hlahriltu and Congregation. The Hlahriltu part is in 3/4 time and consists of a single line of music. The Congregation part is in 3/4 time and consists of two lines of music. The lyrics are written below the Congregation part. The score is divided into two systems, 4 and 5. System 4 includes the first line of the Congregation part, which ends with a long note on 'sual-na'. System 5 includes the second line of the Congregation part, which starts with 'em ve aw!' and ends with 'em ve aw!'. The Hlahriltu part starts at the beginning of system 4 and continues through system 5.

Hlahriltu

Congregation

Van hmun ro - pui pe - lin, a lo kal\_\_\_\_\_ sual-na kar -

4

Khaw - vel hre-hawm a tuar a ni, Aw ka Lal, i va riang

ah\_\_\_\_\_ Khaw - vel

5

em ve aw!

hre - hawm a tuar a ni, Aw ka Lal, I va riang em ve aw!

**Example 14:** Transcription from first verse of 'Van Hmun Ropui Pelin' at Serkawn Baptist Church, 23rd December 2011 (transposed from Eb)

This certainly seems to have been the function of the song-leader in other traditions. Jackson (1975) and others have suggested that the 'lining-out' system that reached a peak in black congregations of the American South during the nineteenth century initially emerged so that the illiterate singers could be informed of the next line's words and essential melody. A few

churches still sing in this way, including a very small number of Primitive Baptist congregations of Appalachia, documented by Tallmadge and Titon<sup>92</sup>. These are assumed to have preserved the tradition in defiance of the shift towards singing schools and notated hymnals in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It was once the officially prescribed method of singing in the Anglican Church for congregations with a low level of literacy, and a similar living tradition can be found in the Gaelic Psalm-singing of Scottish congregations in the Hebrides. The black congregations in America seem to have had contact with evangelists from these lining-out traditions as well as nineteenth-century evangelists from Britain, both of whom seem to have found the lining-out method helpful for the needs of the congregation.

It is unlikely that the missionaries from London and Wales that came to Mizoram between 1894 and 1903 would have come from churches that sang in this way, and although the method is similar, the sound of the singing in the different congregations listed above as well as in Mizoram is extremely different, so it is unlikely that they bear any direct relation. But in every case the tradition seems to have emerged as a way to encourage congregational singing amongst illiterate members. It has had a very practical purpose, and perhaps this may explain the development of the tradition in its early days in Mizoram. It is certainly based on the same principle as ‘lining-out’, and it is remarkable that a likeness of a tradition now thought to be almost obsolete in America and the British Isles is flourishing in every church of an entire Indian state. It is perhaps an obvious solution to a common problem faced by missionaries, but it is all the more remarkable when we observe that the factors that led to its decline in the West, including the notated hymnals, choirs, part-singing and improved literacy, have all been introduced to Mizoram, yet the tradition remains and shows no sign of weakening.

We don’t know exactly how the singing sounded when the songs first began to be proclaimed, but it seems likely that the original didactic function of the *hlahriltu* has now changed. As the recordings on the DVD reveal, the style today can vary significantly from singer to singer, and, most crucially, the diction is rarely clear enough to hear above the congregation and music that is still singing the previous line of the song. Anyone unfamiliar with the words would find her of little assistance; her words can only function as mnemonics to those who already know the song. Unlike the American lining-out, the singing doesn’t stop for the chanter; she must squeeze the line in the short gap by starting early and keeping the drum’s beat in mind. Furthermore, the convention that she does not chant during the *thunawn* (refrain or chorus)

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<sup>92</sup> ‘Lining-out’ in America has in fact been so widely studied, almost decade by decade, in such a variety of churches that one could almost suppose that it is still a common practice. A very small selection includes Jackson (1943), Tallmadge (1959, 1968), Bailey (1978), Titon (1988), Wicks (1989), Pitts (1993) and Smith (1998).

supports the fact that there is an expectation that the congregation is already familiar with the songs. Yet the futility of this role has not rendered her redundant; she remains an integral part of worship both in the church and in the *zaikhawm*.

Lloyd (1991: 132) writes that from the time of the revivals the proclaiming has ‘heightened the meaning of the words.’ Although the origin of the practice is currently uncertain, Lloyd’s statement indicates that it may have become an established convention at the time of the revivals. Thanzauva explains that the *hlahriltu* has a much more spiritual function than might be supposed. He speaks specifically about Jenny, the *hlahriltu* of Zotlang where he was pastor at the time. The church was touched by a collective desire to keep singing and was remarkable that year for maintaining at least a daily *zaikhawm* from just before Christmas until the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012.

She herself was *deeply involved* in the *lengkhawm* whereas many young people didn’t want to involve. And then *she has the spirit of expressing the words*, so that make much difference. And *also she has the skill*. There are people who deeply involve and has the spirit and dance, but they don’t know how to chant it. But the chanting really inspired people, even myself. When Jenny chants *she knows where to shout, she knows exactly where to say Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!* So when that thing at the right time expressed, then we are inspired more and then pushed to act or to wave our hands. So it becomes quite helpful. (Emphasis mine. Interview: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012).

So the way in which a successful *hlahriltu* can become ‘quite helpful’, to borrow Thanzauva’s understatement, would seem to be multi-faceted. From Thanzauva we can suggest the following:

1. A deep personal involvement; an engagement with the occasion. It is a fascinating paradox that the *hlahriltu* is prevented from participating in both the singing and the dancing, yet at the same time she must *want* to take part.
2. The spirit of expressing the words; an awareness of the meaning of individual words and their importance, as well as a sensitivity towards the coherence of the whole chanted phrase.
3. The skill; an ability to proclaim the line at an appropriate pitch, following the contour of the previous line, and with as clear diction as possible.
4. Knowledge of when to shout, when to be spontaneous; a sensitivity to the mood of the congregation at each moment. This is also reflected in the knowledge of how many times to repeat a song, and from which stanza to begin the repeat.



Months later, circumstances brought me and Jenny together as housemates at AICS. She explained some of her principles to me in an interview. She was careful to establish the difference between good and bad song-leading, claiming that those who ‘don’t know clearly’ tend to either ‘shout’ at a high pitch using an incongruous tune against the drum beat, or otherwise chant at a monotone with an abrupt glottal finish. This liberty may be acceptable in *sol-fa zai* (if an appropriate tone such as the first or fifth is chosen), but she insists that a greater sensitivity is required in the leading of the *lengkhawm thluk* down to the very subtle prolonging of the final vowel phoneme. She explains the importance in the *lengkhawm thluk* of basing the melody of the chanted tune on the previously-sung line. This retrospective aspect is surprising, but further emphasises the musical and spiritual function of the role that supersedes the function of making the next line clear.

Chanting is also, there is a tune... Even if they change the tune also we have to change our chanting tune also. [JH: So the tune of the chanting]... it came from the singing tune. The tune is same. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Rather than leading as such, the role seems to involve a more responsive interaction with the congregational singing, in which the tune of the chanted line depends on the previous line sung by the congregation. She also insists that the chanted line must also make sense, sometimes requiring several lines to be chanted at once to complete a coherent sentence:

One thing I want you to know. When the stanza line is too slow and the meaning has to continue to the next line you have to join by chanting... [If we stop after one line] it’s not clear the words, the meaning, the sentence is not full. You have to continue on the next line also. (Ibid)

Likewise, she admits that her previous insistence on matching the tune to the previous line can be momentarily ignored in order to better reflect the meaning; this is essentially word-painting. For example, the phrase ‘chungnung ber’, meaning ‘in the highest’, cannot be sung at a low pitch. In this case the demands of the text’s meaning must come before the musical tune.

As was indicated in the vignette above, the *hlahriltu* is also responsible for the repetitions of the verses that will frequently happen during a song both in the church and in the *zaikhawm*. The following flowchart maps the procedure for such repetitions, which are never planned in advance.

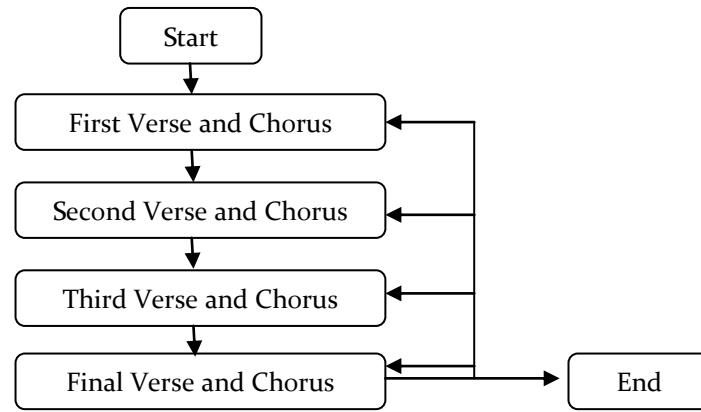


Figure 27: Flowchart for verse repetitions

As can be seen, the basic rule for a song is that each verse must be sung in order with no omissions, and that the song can only finish at the final verse. Especially in the church, which is otherwise highly organised through the formality of the worship leader, this musical flexibility provides a contrasting spontaneity. Although in theory the *hlahriltu* directs any repetition by proclaiming the first line of her chosen verse once the final verse is finished, it is possible for the congregation to undermine her authority. If nothing is proclaimed after the final verse the song might be about to end, but one or more of the congregation might take it upon themselves to start singing another verse and the whole congregation will join again, continuing to sing according to the flowchart above until the song has reached its proper conclusion. If different verses are proclaimed, there may be a brief moment of mixed singing before one eventually dominates. Occasionally even the drummer will contest the decision of the *hlahriltu*, by continuing to drum after the end and bellowing his chosen verse, which the congregation will inevitably follow. This right to rebel creates a rare glimpse of displaced power relations within the hierarchical church structure. It is not hostile, indeed such spontaneity is a welcome and cherished aspect of worship as was highlighted in the previous chapter. Perhaps its value is all the more important because it presents a complete reversal of the normal expectations that exist within the organisation of the church and during the Sunday morning service. The juxtaposition of the two, most pointedly at the spontaneous period of *lengkhawm* that takes place before a service begins, serves to provide a certain equilibrium within Christian worship.

Like the instruments, the role of the *hlahriltu* is one which has crossed over into all the other congregational singing that takes place in the church. It is possible that it was employed during the revivals that pre-date *lengkhawm* as a genre, having been introduced for a combination of didactic and spiritual purposes, so that it is significant as a tradition quite independent of *lengkhawm*. Yet, as has been highlighted, the modernising factors which led to

the decline of 'lining-out' in America and Britain do not seem to have had an equivalent impact on the chanting in Mizoram. Instead, the tradition is firmly integrated into all styles of hymn-singing in church and in the *zaikhawm*. Even in AICS, whose Anglophone worship favours the western 'praise and worship' style in order not to alienate non-Mizo members, one of the four song-leaders is expected to chant through all the songs and hymns. Perhaps its role in uniting the different styles and negating the difference between *lengkhawm zai* and *sol-fa zai* has ensured its survival: *lengkhawm* provides the *hlahriltu* with a context in which her traditional value can be continued, and she in turn serves to reinforce *lengkhawm* as a modern tradition with current relevance. It is clear that the role and significance of the *hlahriltu* may certainly be an area worthy of further study, given more opportunity to research the origins of the tradition and the technicalities of the chanting itself.

### 5.2.3 The Dancing

The nature of the dance (*lam*) associated with *lengkhawm* has already been touched upon, highlighting its origins as a response to the new Christianity of the revivals but owing a debt to the former traditional dances as well as Puma Zai. However, it is important to recognise that only the opportunity to dance is required; if nobody dances on a particular occasion the time of singing can still be described as *lengkhawm*. *Sol-fa zai* is excluded from the *zaikhawm* but not the church service, and although it is by no means forbidden, people are less likely to dance during such singing unless the tune is sufficiently related to that of *lengkhawm zai*. As Vanlaltlani suggests:

Dancing is the expression of a person's joy and happiness due to definite reasons...  
[We] cannot do the same with [*sol-fa zai*] due to its, perhaps, technical control.  
(2008: 91)

It is not clear what she means by 'technical control', but we may suggest that it might be a musical description highlighting the difference between *lengkhawm zai* and *sol-fa zai* that was explored in Chapter 2. Her remark certainly seems to suggest a polarity between the two, thus explaining the significance of the process that has led to the modification of western tunes to suit the *lengkhawm thluk*. Such changes are not merely aesthetic, but result in a genre shift that renders them acceptable to *lengkhawm* and its associated dancing and expressions of spirituality. Pachuau (2002: 140) argues that modern dancing has changed since the time of the revivals, with less 'foot stamping' and 'excessive trances', but concedes that the characteristic waving and swaying of hands, and the spontaneous group dance have remained. Even those features which he claims have disappeared are still observable amongst a handful

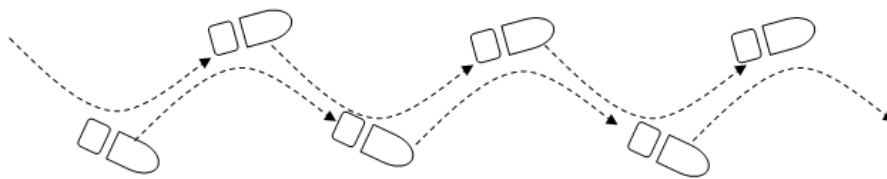
of individuals, and they continue to be a particularly important feature of worship in the UPC denomination.

Although there are numerous conventions that have emerged in modern *lengkhawm* dancing, only a small number of rules must be kept:

1. The dance must proceed anti-clockwise.
2. The beat of the *khuangpui* determines the alternate right and left footsteps.
3. Dancers follow the same circular path as each other, eventually forming a ring of dancers. Concentric inner circles may form once the first ring is full.

Beyond this, the actual style of the footstep, the space that is used by a dancer, and the upper-body gestures, are determined by environmental factors as well as the personal style of the individual. On any one beat some will place their left foot while others will place their right foot. Although a small number simply walk, with only a loose sense of time-keeping, the majority of dancers follow a footstep as illustrated in Figure 28. If it is too crowded, this step becomes difficult to follow. I have sometimes observed variations on this step which conserve space better in such instances.

<i>Khuangpui</i>	K		K		K		K		K
<i>Khuangte</i>	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k	k
<i>Right foot</i>	R	-	o	*	R	-	o	*	R
<i>Left foot</i>	o	*	L	-	o	*	L	-	o



*Key to symbols:*

- R and L : The moment at which the right (R) or left (L) foot is placed on the floor  
 - : The foot remains on the floor  
 o : The foot is lifted off the floor (no more than 5 cm) and begins to trace the path shown by the dotted arrows above  
 \* : The foot's path reaches the point at which it is brought beside the other foot before moving outwards again

**Figure 28:** Dance-steps

The main step demonstrates a consciousness of the *khuangte* as well as the *khuangpui*, as the inward shift of the foot, often accompanied by a slight bend of the knees and by implication a lowering of the upper body, would coincide with the subdivided beat that comes between the main beat. This awareness of the half-beat is important when we remember that a typical characteristic of *lengkhawm zai*, especially of the spirited *zaikhawm* atmosphere, is a gradual but often significant increase in tempo. The two drummers work together to achieve this, and it is often difficult to identify which drummer is leading the change, but dancers with keen ears for both will successfully be able to keep up with the changing tempo.

The history of the *lengkhawm* dancing has been thoroughly documented in Chapter 2, and it is often assumed that its status as a non-western practice that was emphatically not introduced by the missionaries implies that it is a 'traditional dance'. However, it is clearly different from the highly uniform and performative dances of *chai*, *chheih* and *cheraw* which all require skill and practice. These are performed at cultural displays, where the *lam* of the *lengkhawm* is excluded. Indeed, Lalhlira (2008: 294) describes it as not 'cultural', even though it is certainly a unique part of Mizo culture. This is not to say that it is not considered a dance; the verb *lam*, ('dance') is used equally for both. He means, of course, that it does not belong to the typical presentation of 'Mizo culture' that is designed to communicate a celebration of a constructed homogenous Mizo heritage. However, if we accept Durkheim's claim that a rite that becomes used for entertainment is no longer a rite (1982: 284), then the exclusion of *lengkhawm* from cultural entertainment programmes perhaps validates it as a ritual of deeper current significance than those rites which have been consigned to the Chapchar Kut.

Nevertheless, in *tlanglam* dancing (formerly Puma Zai), we can certainly detect elements which have become conventional in *lengkhawm lam*, supporting the view that the modern (1907) phenomenon of Puma Zai acted as the bridge between traditional 'cultural' dancing and the dance of Christian worship (see also Zairema 1991). Lawmsanga (2010: 173) emphasises the importance of ecstasy and spontaneity in both, in which those dancing would be bent very low, and those sitting (on the ground in *tlanglam*) would be clapping or swaying, joining the dance if they felt sufficiently inspired to do so. This personal discretion and the possibility to be spiritually engaged even while seated to the side is still true of *lengkhawm lam*, and although most dancers are no longer 'bent very low', some dancers still emulate this style.

For instance, some individuals stoop low in the process of dancing in the circle, once every few beats, and not on a regular basis. When this occurs, there is little disruption to the footstep or to those dancing in front of or behind the individual; indeed it remains entirely ignored by the other participants. This brief but distinctive posture can be easily compared with the stooped

posture maintained throughout the dance in *tlanglam*, and it could even allude to some of the choreography of ‘cultural’ dances such as *solakia*, or indeed *chheih lam* (see Zama 2009).

If an individual is stooping excessively, such that they stoop more than they shuffle, some will drop out of the circle and dance at the side. They will rotate slowly on the spot in the same stooped position; eyes closed and quite shut out from the surrounding activity. Especially in the *zaikhawm* context, such dancing can usually be described as *ṭul*, the involuntary physical behaviour introduced in Chapter 3. Alternatively they might seek the seclusion of the middle of the circle, and often several individuals will be spotted in this position, occasionally lying prostrate on the floor, oblivious to the crowds of shuffling feet that surround them. Even after a song has finished, he or she might stay for some time alone in the *lamtual*, crying and groaning a private prayer, often repeating the phrase ‘Halleluiah, Amen.’ The *zaikhawm* does not wait for them: the next song might begin without them ever returning to their seat.

The dual dimension of the *lengkhawm lam* encouraging a very individualistic engagement with the worship combined with the collective and communitarian nature of the worship context also highlights some of the ways in which one’s individual identity cannot be kept private in Mizo society; although the decision to dance is a personal choice, it is also a public statement about one’s spirituality, and it has long been the case that a person’s involvement in the *zaikhawm* can tell much about their personal spiritual life. At the time of the fourth revival the term *thlarau mi* (‘person of the spirit’) was used to describe those who danced, whereas *tisa mi* (‘person of the flesh’), described those who did not (Lalpekhlua 2007: 121). Attitudes today are more moderate, but David, the music secretary at AICS, acknowledges that it still forms a part of people’s attitudes, and that one’s decision to dance or otherwise can be subject to judgement by one’s peers:

We tend to say that those who do not fully engage with Mizo worship do not possess true Mizo spirituality. That is not to say that they are not born again, but their spirituality is more western in character. Even I feel that I am not as engaged as I could be, when I compare myself to some of my friends, but I do enjoy participating in the dancing even though many other young people do not.  
(Interview, 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012)

Although we can learn from these distinctions that not everyone participates in the dancing, and also that not everyone is expected to, those who do dance tend to speak of it as a compulsion, inspired by the combination of the drums and the tune which touches them in such a way that must be expressed through dance. This is a common phenomenon; in Tamil Nadu, Dalton has observed that Dalit Christians often feel compelled to dance when they hear

‘folk music’, despite their claims that such music is unacceptable for worship (2008: 97). It is in a similar way that many Mizo people, of a variety of ages, experience a compulsion to dance to certain songs, primarily because of their melodies and the drum-beat rather than the text. Yet not everybody feels this compulsion, and this has led several to anticipate an eventual disappearance of the *lengkhawm lam*. From my experience, if this is to happen at all, it will not be for a considerable time yet. Although young men and women are often too shy to dance, I observed large numbers of dancers of all other ages participating, including many young children who did not know the songs or tunes. They loved to take part, even though they could not yet sing along. Perhaps it is also for the sake of these children that the survival of the didactic role of the *hlahriltu* might be ensured. It is evident that *lengkhawm* is much more than just a context for the *zai*, and that the opportunity to participate non-verbally through dance is an inclusive feature that is rarely offered in the other forms of worship in church.

#### 5.2.4 The *Zaikhawm* Context in Radio and Television

An examination of some of the features of *lengkhawm* can therefore highlight the way in which it continues to have a significant role to play in the modern Mizo context. As Sarot has suggested, ‘traditions’ are necessary not for their invariability but for their ability to provide a context in which change and modernisation can take place (2001: 21-40), thus integrating and responding to modern elements such as band instruments that might otherwise have divided Mizo worship. The three elements discussed above each have their own historical narratives and the instruments and chanting in particular have become established as independently significant parts of worship across a variety of styles. Their adaptability has created a mutual relationship with *lengkhawm*, and especially the *zaikhawm*, in which each depends on the other for survival as a relevant part of the modern context.

This context first began to be shaped by the radio and commercial recordings of western gospel music, but was further influenced by the advent of the television in Mizoram<sup>93</sup>, all of which Lawmsanga (2010: 137) and Zama (2006: 11) claim led to subsequent revivals in the 60’s, 80’s, 90’s and 2002-3, of a more American character than the earlier revivals. Dueck and Toynbee note that mass mediation enables ‘musicians to build upon or even invent links with the music of other, imagined, musicians far away’ (2011: 3). This profoundly summarises the Mizo response to mass media, in which gospel and country music from America has been adopted and appreciated as if an invisible and historical link exists between these separate

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<sup>93</sup> Most urban homes have had a television since the late 1990’s, with the first mainstream broadcasts being established from 1991.

Christian communities. This is especially because the Gaither Homecoming performances<sup>94</sup>, which Bill Gaither began in 1991<sup>95</sup>, bear such a close contextual relationship with the *zaikhawm* tradition. Mizo viewers saw American ‘families’ meeting together in a simulated ‘home’ environment for the sole purpose of singing gospel songs. This is another example that supports Nettl’s theory of compatibility, in that a compatible performance context is often likely to lead to greater acceptance and assimilation on the part of the receiving culture (1963: 36).

It also reflects his insistence that western music might bring a ‘cultural’ influence as well as (or instead of) a stylistic influence (1986: 362), and here we see the influence being that of the context and culture of Southern Gospel. The main difference is the promotion of solo and group artists as part of the Homecoming event, whereas the *zaikhawm* is just for congregational singing. This exposure to the American Homecoming format has not changed the *zaikhawm* itself, but it has certainly influenced other events which have emerged especially in worship events (often called ‘fellowships’) designed for young people. Zama (2006: 11) has also noted that ‘praise and worship sessions’ modelled on the Billy Graham ministry have become increasingly popular since such shows were seen on television. However, my suggestion is that this has been largely due to the initial similarity that was observed between such contexts and the *zaikhawm*.

As one major example, when the Baptist Youth Fellowship (TKP) celebrated their diamond jubilee in 2011 (months before I arrived) they organised a highly imitative ‘Homecoming’-style event and recorded it for DVD release. The invited guests, including many high profile church leaders, sat in the hollow square formation that in America has come to connote *Sacred Harp* singing. Famous choirs, small singing groups and soloists had been planted among the group. Just as in a Gaither Homecoming, the event combined congregational singing in which everyone remains seated, with strictly orchestrated ‘spontaneous’ contributions from the guest singers, often during the singing of a single song. Some songs would be separated by an exhortation from one of the senior church leaders sitting on a front row. The TKP DVD was very professionally executed and the resemblance to the Gaither format is unmistakeable.

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<sup>94</sup> The Homecoming performance context owes a debt to the Sacred Harp singing conventions of nineteenth-century America which continue in some communities, especially in Georgia. See Stanley 1982.

<sup>95</sup> The Gaither music belongs to the Southern Gospel tradition, itself rich with multiple influences and heritages. See Harrison 2008.





**Figure 29:** Still from T̄KP DVD (2011). A vocal quartet (including my own teaching colleague Moses on the right) rises from the seated congregation for their performance.



**Figure 30:** Still from 'This is my Story' Gaither Homecoming (1997), 39:21. A soloist rises from the congregation. Compare previous illustration.

Its relationship to the *zaikhawm* is obvious, but important differences remain, such as the non-hierarchical emphasis of the *zaikhawm* in which special guests and musicians would not make any special contribution. Instead, honoured guests sit at the front and special singers and groups have the opportunity to exhibit. The reserve of the adopted Homecoming style is also an important difference; there is no dancing or spiritual outbursts and all singers remain seated unless it is their turn to 'perform'. This reserve perhaps epitomises the Mizo perception of western spirituality compared with Mizo spirituality, yet it was embraced nevertheless in this project.

The God Channel may have been one of the biggest western influences on Mizo worship since the departure of the missionaries, but by far the most popular channels in Mizoram are still the local Mizo channels. IMEM (with the slogan 'IT for God') is the Mizo equivalent of the God Channel, often broadcasting the same Gaither videos and dubbed sermons of the same televangelists, as well as Mizo sermons and televised church services. Two other state channels provide a variety of English and Mizo, secular and Christian entertainment and news. But in urban centres such as Aizawl, Lunglei and Lawngtlai, a far greater range of channels are available, run by local entrepreneurs. In Aizawl, the LPS family of channels is named after its owners Laldailova Pachuau and Sons; there are six channels named LPS 1-6.

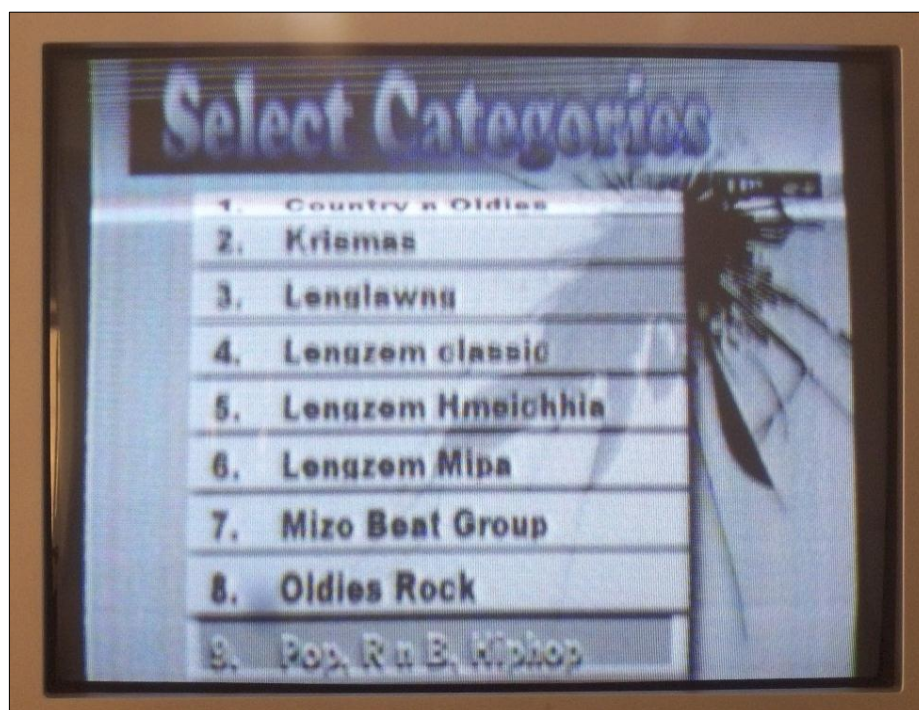


Figure 31: LPS 2 Choice of Categories (Photo: Author)

The television demand channels are the primary means of local song transmission in modern Mizoram. They function in a similar way to the MTV India channel and resemble a jukebox in format. There are '24/7 Gospel' channels as well as '24/7 Lengzem' channels. *Lengzem zai* refers to 'love songs', or secular songs, but even on these channels there is a smaller gospel category which actually tends to be very popular. The channels display lists or samples of the song selection with accompanying codes, and anyone can choose to request a song by sending the code by SMS or by phoning the operator. On LPS 2, 'Lengzem Demand', we can watch the selection process on screen while the operator scrolls through the options to find the selected song. While waiting for a request the operator (observed sometimes by the cursor on the screen) scrolls through these lists to show what is available.

The popularity of such a format represents a modernisation of the same communitarian and localised experience of songs that has been important in Mizoram. The jukebox demand format is not unique to Mizoram, but it can easily be accepted that it suits the Mizo culture very well. Just as anybody can request a song in the *zaikhawm* for everyone else to sing, choosing a song to be played on television affects the experience of all other viewers. This democratic approach is also simulated in some Mizo television shows which consist of a television presenter visiting villages and interviewing local people about their favourite songs before playing them on television. This demonstrates the importance of including all members of a community in the appreciation of songs. Similarly, one programme shown on LPS 1 shows videos submitted by bereaved families which consist of a compilation of photos of a family member who has recently died, with accompanying music. These videos are shown in quick succession, and often feature the same choice of bereavement song, but the function is clearly to facilitate the communal mourning process that has always been important in Mizo society. This is a mass-mediated development, but by no means a replacement, of *khawhar lenpui*.

Though writing in a very different context, Waterman's thoughts on the teaching of ethnomusicology in American colleges is also of some relevance here. Citing Trotter's 'four pedagogical steps' towards the ideal of an 'I-You dialogue' (2006: 125), he suggests that a sense of co-presence can be achieved when the perceived 'Other' does something familiar, which is therefore strange. It is only when students see something of their own culture where they least expect it that an identification with the new culture can become meaningful. We can perhaps reverse this idea, and apply it to the issue at hand. In the Mizo context, it would appear that western music has been most acceptable when they have recognised something of themselves in it, such as in the Gaither Homecomings.

Television may have brought exposure to a global media, but the impact on the Mizo approach to song transmission has been an expansion rather than erosion of former ways. One reason for the popularity of western music is, according to Nettl, its 'great complexity' and 'accompanying technology' (2005: 435), and it is the accompanying technology that has certainly had an impact in Mizoram. But, as Nettl continues, it is compatibility which is of crucial importance, and this has been demonstrated to exist between the *zaikhawm* and Homecoming context for example. We have seen how the Gaither Homecoming provided a modern way in which to re-interpret the *zaikhawm*, without removing the *zaikhawm* itself. We have seen how the demand channels reflect the communitarian enjoyment of songs so important to Mizo society even before the revivals, as well as enhancing aspects of traditional life, for example by providing a mass mediated outlet for community mourning. Perhaps this is an example of what Dueck and Toynbee would describe as 'producing locality' by appropriating western music (2011: 5). It is hoped that the discussion has demonstrated that the globalised exposure the Mizo people have experienced has led to a selective westernisation in which only elements of other music and music traditions which already resonate with the existing Mizo context have been readily welcomed into the Mizo experience. While this does not preclude change, it represents a slower, more organic adaptation of existing traditions, and has rarely been seen to do anything other than enrich Mizo musical experience with additional contexts and concepts without fundamentally transforming existing practices.

## 6. Conclusion

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This thesis was founded on the premise that *lengkhawm* is a musical practice that presents an interesting interaction between the Mizo understanding of tradition and traditional values and the more recent reactions to modernity. It is a modern tradition. We have sought to explore this relationship further from a range of perspectives, ultimately aiming to identify to what extent *lengkhawm zai* can be described as traditional, and how it has been shaped by the Christian traditions introduced by missionaries and later by Christian broadcasters.

Chapter 2 traced the early history of *lengkhawm*, and discussed its identity as a modern tradition belonging to the Christian era but with organic origins arising from the musical and cultural inclinations of the Mizo worshippers. We found that in the early twentieth century there already seemed to be a decline in the dances and songs which are now preserved in cultural displays. The first missionaries brought western hymns which were rapidly adopted and spread to other villages even ahead of Christianity itself. Insisting on self-alienation from ‘traditional’ music, early Mizo Christians exclusively sang these hymns and even contributed many of the translations which are still popular in today’s hymnals.

It came to be the spiritual revivals that occurred between 1906 and 1930 that led to the formation of the Mizo Christian society that exists today. Indeed, it united the disparate village population in an unprecedented way by providing them with a common religion, church administration and historical narrative supported by a shared folklore and culture. Before this point, villages may have had much in common, and we do not deny their ethnic unity, but it is unlikely that the sense of the single Mizo identity existed before Christianity became accepted throughout the region.

During this time, musical innovations took place that ultimately led to *lengkhawm zai*, within the community singing contexts of *lengkhawm* and *zaikhawm*. Though these were modern introductions that reinterpreted the drum and introduced other unfamiliar characters such as the song-proclaimer, it became a symbol for the unified traditional Mizo life that had only just been culturally established by Christianity. Birthed out of a situation of modernity, its identity as a traditional form of worship was important in the reinforcement of Mizo tradition.

The musical analysis of Chapter 3 is the first attempt of its kind to precisely articulate the melodic and vocal features of *lengkhawm zai* in a musicological framework, but its aim was to contribute original suggestions about the musical processes that took place as the traditional tune of *lengkhawm zai* emerged. Though initially setting out to discover the reasons for



retaining characteristics, and the reasons for adopting new elements, we found that a more complex interaction was more likely to have taken place, involving a dialogue between compatible elements of both western hymn-tunes as well as the songs which have been sung before Christianity, and notably *tlanglam zai*.

We found that the contour and structure of western hymns have largely been retained, probably because they already bore similarity to existing songs. However, in the area of pitch the greatest modifications have taken place, because this is where the level of compatibility was lowest. Tonal diatonicism has been replaced by a pentatonicism that emphasises the first, third and fifth degrees, and the third degree has a particularly important role in characterising the style, because of its ambivalent position as a neutral third, and its tendency to fall to the first degree in performance.

Again, we established that the tune is a new development produced from an interaction between different melodic styles, and does not therefore represent a false return to an eponymous tune that dominated before Christianity. However, despite being a modern tune in this sense, it has come to signify a traditional musical style, and has in some instances taken an integral role in areas where different songs would once have dominated, such as in the funeral wakes which now consist in an all-night *lengkhawm* now considered to be a traditional aspect of Mizo mourning.

This was developed in Chapter 4, in which we encountered the collision that takes place between the Mizo historical narrative and the actual processes that took place in the construction of the Mizo identity. This can be resolved when we understand the synchronous role of Christianity in this construction, not as a supplantation of a former way of life but as a foundational element in the establishment of Mizoness, without which the current unified perception of a traditional Mizo way of life with its associated values and ethics might never have been homogenised. Now that this process has taken place, we have chosen to accept this perception as the pervading lens through which Mizo traditional society is understood, so that the significance of *lengkhawm* as an important and, crucially, *traditional* worship style from the Mizo perspective can be affirmed.

‘Zo nun mawi’, the ‘beautiful Mizo life’, is a concept that has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity through the efforts of Thanzauva, and a primary emphasis here is on the importance of community ethics within Mizo society. Whether we examine the ethics of *tlawmngaihna*, *hnatlang*, or *beirual*, we have been able to recognise the way in which *lengkhawm* provides a musical and worshipful opportunity to express these ideals in the

Christian context. However, rather than simply embodying these, an element of subversion is also involved as we witness the unusual relationships between participants in *lengkhawm*. This is especially evident in the area of gender roles and perception, in which the expressiveness of the women and the reserve of the men is just one way in which traditional expectations of gender are reinterpreted in *lengkhawm*. Furthermore, the power relations between the song-proclaimer, the drummers and the other musicians offer a very different interpretation of egalitarian democratic society than is found in the formal church service.

However, the most important aspect from the Mizo perspective is the way in which *lengkhawm* embodies the deeply-held 'Mizo sentiment' and 'Mizo spirituality'. We have elucidated the degree to which these two concepts are intertwined as well as the way in which music, and particularly *lengkhawm*, is an important expression of them. The fact that *lengkhawm* is often used to explain and define Mizo spirituality demonstrates its important status as a primary embodiment of traditional sentiment that still has current relevance in worship today.

The dialogue between tradition and modernity has pervaded this thesis; first as we recounted the impact of the missionaries as they introduced a new and unfamiliar pattern of worship, followed by the musical analysis of what their songs might have contributed to the *lengkhawm thluk*. Chapter 5 was dedicated to a more detailed study of this issue within the current worship contexts in which *lengkhawm* takes place.

We have found that the incorporation of modern instruments such as the guitar and keyboard has not detracted from the primary role of the two drums but that their use has enabled *lengkhawm* to retain a relevance and validity within modern church worship. The *hlahriltu*, whose song-proclaiming seems to have once held a didactic function, has also continued to be an indispensable element in worship. Both she and the modern instruments enjoy popularity in the singing of both *lengkhawm* and *sol-fa zai*, and the bridge that they create between the two styles has reinforced their own significance but has also served to maintain the currency of *lengkhawm zai* in church.

Perhaps one of the primary outcomes of this thesis is the demonstration that at least in the context of *lengkhawm* the distinction between western and Mizo Christian culture is not at all straightforward. Lott's analysis (1986: 6) of the situation in India, represented in Chapter 5 in the broadcasting of western shows and channels on television, is very helpful. He describes a 'ferment of modernity and of counter-cultural life in India' in which a genuine interest in the

West represents an inclusive and inter-cultural ‘fluidity’. Exposure generates interest in, but not necessarily complete appropriation of, the newly experienced culture.

For Mizoram, this ‘ferment’ began in 1894 when the first missionaries began to teach in the region, bringing not just Christianity but also modern approaches to education and healthcare. Chapter 2 narrated this period in Mizoram’s history, setting the scene for the emergence of a new tradition of *lengkhawm* and *lengkhawm zai* by the end of the revival period. Even at this stage, Lorrain wrote in his report of 1913 that ‘we are not here to make them duplicates’ (MGCC 1994: 99), apparently anticipating the post-colonial criticism that would soon be directed at missionaries. The openness of the missionaries to different approaches to Christian worship must be acknowledged in this instance, and the western hymns they introduced in response to the self-alienation of the early Mizo converts can retrospectively be seen to have acted as a bridge through which *lengkhawm* could emerge, resonating better with the sounds of songs that were sung before Christianity. As Vanlalchhuanawma writes, ‘the transition from tradition to western hymns to the new Mizo hymns is a process of evolution rather than of substitution’ (2006: 273).

Perhaps ‘evolution’ is not the right word here. It has not formed a part of this thesis thus far, primarily because the western hymns were not discarded once *lengkhawm zai* ‘evolved’, but have continued to form an important part of the Mizo church music repertoire, often being sung to the original tunes following the four-part sol-fa notation. There has been no ‘extinction’ of the traditions that contributed to *lengkhawm*; even some of the traditional songs and dances continue to be promoted by the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and at cultural festivals, especially *tlanglam zai*. The process that led to the emergence of *lengkhawm* has instead resulted in a co-existence of multiple musical traditions which share a common relation in *lengkhawm zai*. It is clear that it is constructed out of a complex relationship between traditional songs and the western hymns. This relationship was unwittingly highlighted by the colonialist McCall in 1949, who described traditional singing in the following way:

The lilt of such songs strike a chord to the heart; they are part and parcel of all that has gone to create Lushai. (1949: 75)

He is describing the way in which the traditional tunes had the power to ‘touch’ the heart, referring to the Mizo sentimentality, or *lunglen*. This language has also been extensively applied to the tune of *lengkhawm zai*, such that McCall’s description could easily be mistaken



for referring to the new Christian songs. It is this sentimental quality of the music that has been one of the key factors in establishing the importance of *lengkhawm zai* in Mizo worship.

Finally, we have found that although the homogenous Mizo identity is a post-Christian construction, *lengkhawm* is an important expression of this identity, with its roots in a culture that existed before Christianity. The importance of *lengkhawm* in reinforcing this Mizo identity is expressed by Lalrinsanga:

The new indigenous tune can also be said to be a birth of a new distinct identity –  
a Mizo Christian identity. (2011: 23)

A humorous Mizo legend recounted by Lalruna (1985: 193) tells the story of the playful character Chhura, who bought the art of whistling from a man in another village. However, he fell over on his way home and stopped whistling. He searched high and low for the tune but couldn't find it. A Pawi man (from the south of Mizoram) came and tried to help, but it was no use. The Pawi stranger sat down, tired, and 'began to whistle as the task was indeed very hopeless.' Suddenly Chhura heard what he had been looking for: 'He started whistling the tune again and went home happily!'

Sometimes it takes an encounter with a stranger's music to be reminded of what is important and significant in one's own musical tradition. According to my own interpretation, the legend above is quite analogous to the important themes of this thesis, assessing *lengkhawm* as an indigenous Mizo tradition that was the product of an encounter with strangers and the music which they brought. That music, the sounds of the hymns, was foreign, yet we have seen that they contained elements of compatibility that resonated with the sounds that were already familiar in the traditional Mizo songs. After a period of revivals, in which Christianity became an integral and native part of Mizo society and identity, these foreign sounds proved suitable for adaptation. The result was a new style of singing, *lengkhawm zai*, as well as a new *lengkhawm* and *zaikhawm* worship context which reminded the Mizo people of the musical sounds and community music gatherings of the past. They touched the Mizo sentiment in the same way, and this new tradition became and has remained a uniquely Mizo Christian tradition. The Mizo people found *lengkhawm zai*, just as Chhura rediscovered his whistling tune.

## Appendix A: Fieldwork Locations and Map

*Note: To provide a sense of scale to the accompanying map, the distance between Aizawl and Lunglei is 235km. It is a six-hour journey by the main mountain road that connects them.*

### ***Churches visited:***

Central Baptist Church, Aizawl: 6<sup>th</sup> November  
 Chaltlang West Baptist Church, Aizawl: March  
 Emmanuel Baptist Church, Aizawl: 13<sup>th</sup> November  
 Gilead Baptist Church, Aizawl, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 4<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 5<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> February  
 Kanaan Baptist Church, Aizawl: 30<sup>th</sup> October  
 Kuki Worship Service, Chanmari, Aizawl: 20<sup>th</sup> November  
 Ramhlun North Baptist Church, Aizawl: 27<sup>th</sup> November  
 Ramhlun South Baptist Church, Aizawl: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> December  
 Shalom Baptist Church, Aizawl: 6<sup>th</sup> November

Electric Veng Baptist Church, Lunglei: 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> March  
 Farm Veng Baptist Church, Lunglei: 24<sup>th</sup> December  
 Serkawn Baptist Church, Lunglei: 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> December  
 Zotlang Baptist Church, Lunglei: 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> December

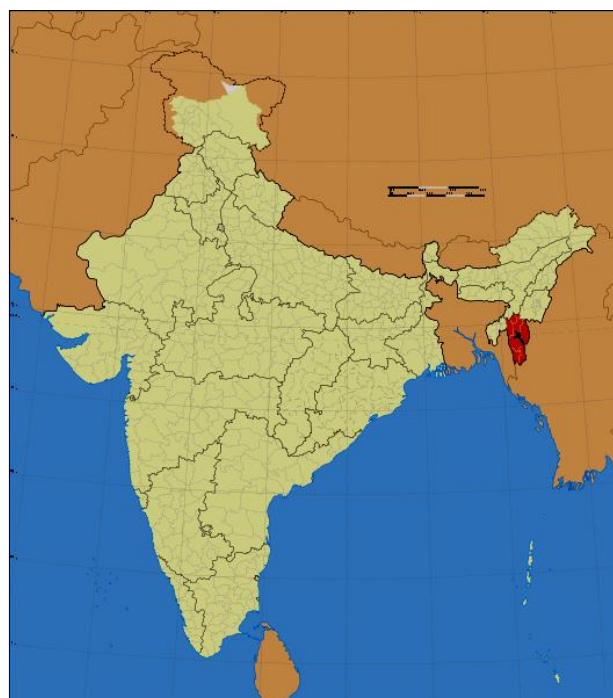
Putlungasih Baptist Church, Putlungasih Village: 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> December

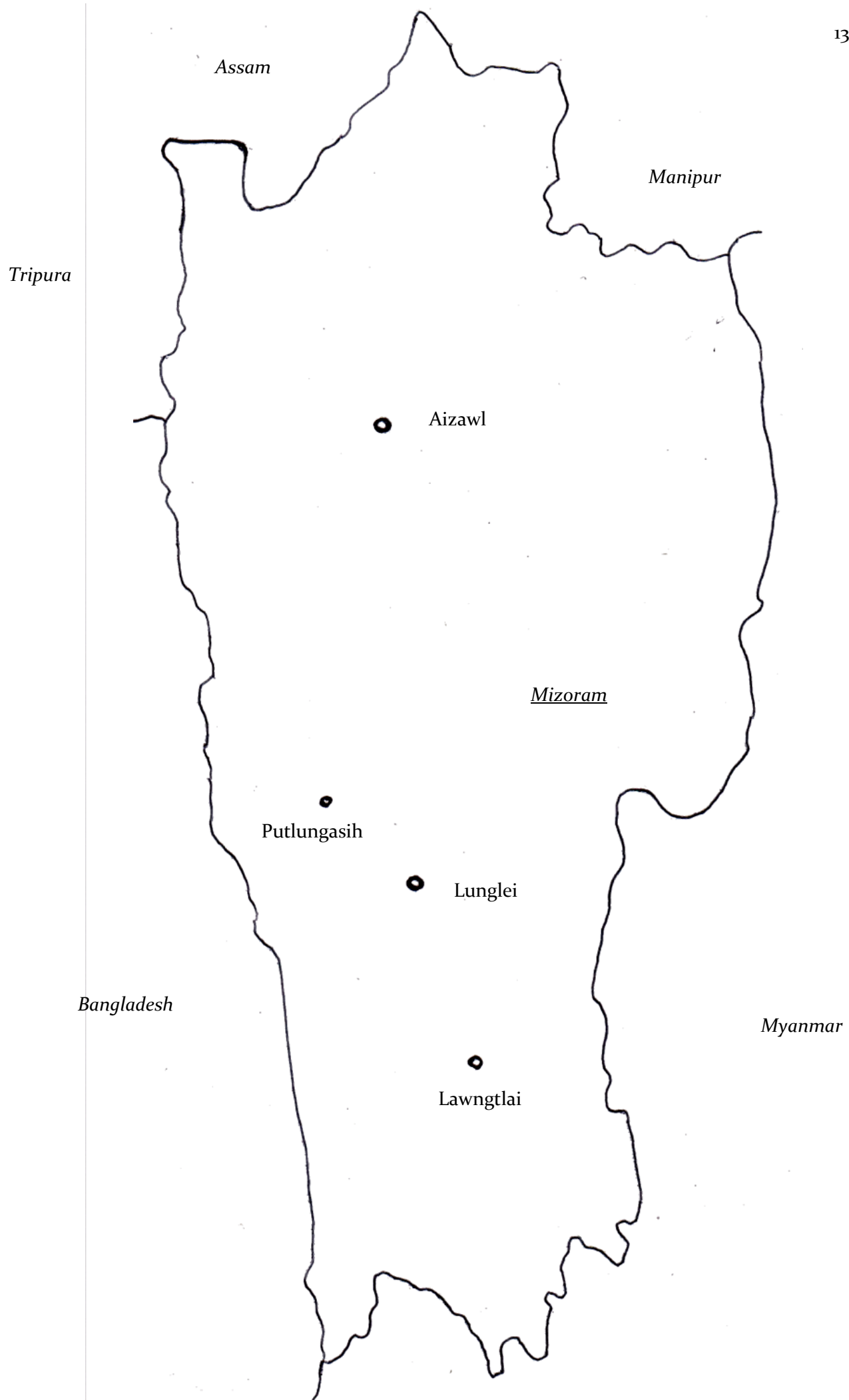
### ***Other places of interest visited:***

Academy of Integrated Christian Studies, Aizawl (My residence)  
 Aizawl Theological College  
 Aizawl Lammual (Chapchar Kut 2012)  
 Fortune Recording Studio, Aizawl  
 Baptist Church of Mizoram Headquarters, Serkawn, Lunglei  
 Theiriat Village, Lunglei (site of first BCM church, 1910)  
 Nehemia Prayer Mountain, Lunglei (Founded by Rev. Killuaia who I interviewed)  
 Lawngtlai Town

Map of India; Mizoram indicated in red.

*(From commons.wikimedia.org, created by users Nichalp and Planemad, 2008)*





## Appendix B: Song Collection

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The table on the opposite page contains the details of all the songs which I documented during my six months in Mizoram. They are listed as far as possible by the date in which they were published in a Mizo hymnal, although they would have been composed and sung before these dates. The following explains each field in further detail:

### ***KHB Date***

Date of first publication. 1903 B and 1903 P refer to the Baptist and Presbyterian song collections respectively of 1903. In 1908 the first collaborative *Kristian Hla Bu* was published. Subsequent editions which I have examined include 1915 and 1922. In 1915 the hymnal contained a 'Hla Thar' ('new song') section at the back with separate indexing. This is indicated by 'HT Section' on the table. In 1930 an entire 'Hla Thar Bu' was published containing only new songs; this is indicated by 'HT'. The copy held at the Angus Library in Oxford contains a handwritten reference to 'Mal Min Sawm Turin' but does not include the song itself, hence its inclusion at this point in the chronology. In 1955 the first KHB with tonic sol-fa notation was published. The remaining songs marked by a question mark are not included in this book, but I have not had access to the editions which post-date it other than the latest edition of 2005. The final song is only included in the latest hymnal, the 2009 *Pathian Fakna Hla Bu*.

### ***KHB***

Indicates the current KHB number.

### ***Song***

Mizo song title.

### ***LZ/SZ***

Indicates whether the song is *lengkhawm zai* or *sol-fa zai*. LT indicates that though printed as *sol-fa zai*, the song was sung in *lengkhawm thluk*.

### ***Dates Sung***

From my records dating from October 2011 to March 2012.

### ***English Title***

If applicable. Those in quotation marks are English titles attributed to Mizo compositions.

### ***Tune, Original Text, Mizo Text***

Composer of original tune, composer of original text (if it is a translation) and composer or translator to whom the Mizo text is attributed.

### ***First Source***

Probable hymnal from which the song, text or tune was first obtained (see bibliography). SSSa refers to *Sacred Songs and Solos: 888 Pieces*; SSSb refers to the *Revised and Enlarged Edition*.

KHB Date	KHB Song	LZ / SZ	Dates Sung	English	Tune	Original Text	Mico text	First text
1903 B	81 Ringtu Zawng Zawngte U	SZ, LT	25/12, 26/12	O Come all ye faithful	John Reading 'Adeste Fideles'	Latin Hymn 18th C. Trans Mercer (1854)	Rev. F.W. Savidge 1862-1935	SS5a 31
1903 P	38 Pathian Min Hmangahna	SZ, LT	25/12	All Hail the power of Jesus' name	Welsh Melody: Joanna, 'Alaw Gymreig'	Rev Edward Perronet 1726-1792 (1779)	Rev. D.E. Jones 1870-1947	WTB 421 / 196
1903 P	252 Aw Isu Hming i Fak Ang U	SZ, LT	17, 18, 26/12	Pass me not	Ellor/Shrubsole/McGranahan	F.J. Crosby 1820-1915 (1868)	Rev. E. Rowlands 1867-1939	SS5a 203 / WTB 7
1903 P	555 Aw Isu Kei Min Kai	SZ	29/1		W.H. Doane 1832-1915, 1870		Simeon Rynjah	SS5a 20
1903 P	565 Pathian Lekha ka ring e	SZ	4/12		From Sylhet Children's Hymns 14 'Ba-bi Hla'		Rev. D.E. Jones 1870-1947	Silver Songs
1908	5 Leilung pian hun lawmawin	SZ	4/12		Phoebe P. Knapp 1839-1908 (Blessed Assurance 1873)		Rev. D.E. Rowlands 1867-1939	SS5a 500
1908	16 Aw Pathian nang laber i ni	SZ	10/12		Hugh Wilson 1766-1824 'Martyrdom'	From Welsh Tune Book 92	Rai Bhajur 1858-1914	WTB 90
1908	48 Mangang leh lunggala	SZ	6/11	Count your blessings	EO Excell 1851-1921 (1897)	Rev J Oatman 1856-1926	Rev. E. Rowlands 1867-1939	Free Church Hymns 112
1908	137 Tuifinriat ang	SZ, LT	28/12	Here is Love vast as the ocean	Orig. Britain's Lament	William Rees	Rev. E. Rowlands 1867-1939	Hymns and Tunes of Wales 677 Tune 2
1908	197 Isu Kraws Min Hnaihir Rawh	SZ	27/11	Jesus keep me near the cross	W.H. Doane 1832-1915	FJ Crosby	Leta 1883-1925	SS5a 127
1908	308 Aw Thlarau Thianghim	SZ	29/01, 29/01		From Khasi Tune Book 63		Leta 1883-1925	Khasi Tune Book 63
1908	425 i Hlim Ang U	SZ	29/01, 19/02	O Happy Day, that fixed my choice	Edward F. Rimbault 1816-1876 (with refrain, 1854)	Rev. P. Doddridge 1702-1751 (1755)	Rev. Chalhiana 1890-1969	SS5a 65
1908	449 Ka Nun i Tan Ka Pe	SZ	6/11	My life was given for thee	P.P. Bliss 1838-1876, also "Baca" (1873)	Havergal (1859)	Rev. E. Rowlands 1867-1939	SS5a
1915	82 Lalithutleng	SZ, LT	18/12	Thou didst leave thy throne	Ira D. Sankey 1840-1908 (1898)	E.E. Steele Elliot 1836-1897 (1864)	Dr. Lalhuta Sallo 1886-1927	SS5b 35
1915	173 Inanuela thi zaman	SZ	11/3	There is a fountain filled with blood	Early American, arr. Dr. L. Mason 1792-1872 (1830)	William Cowper 1731-1800 (1772)	Rev. Chhuahkhama 1885-1949	SS5b 129
1915	208 Lalpa Krawsa i tuar	SZ	30/10	Nearer the cross my heart can say	Mrs.J.F. Knapp 1839-1908	F.J. Crosby (1868)	Rev. Taisena 1891-1959	SS5b 859
1915	309 Thu mak ka	SZ, LT	11/3		Charles H. Gabriel 1856-1932		Rev. Langkhaia 1884-1979	SS5a 316
1915	316 Kawng Zau Taka	SZ	5/12	The Gate Aljar for me	S.J. Vail 1818-1884	Mrs L. Baxter 1809-1874 (1872)	Rev. Langkhaia 1884-1979	SS5b 372
1915	387 Chawihna Ram	SZ	4/12	We'll work till Jesus comes	Dr. William Miller 19th c.	Mrs E. Mills 1805-1829	Rev. R. Dala 1884-1922	SS5b 920
1915	434 Aw Lalpa, chungnung ber	SZ	17/12	J. Ellis 'Callest'			Thanga 1883-1957	Free Church Hymns III no 2
1915	482 Hla Taka khaw dur	SZ	18/12	Far beyond the storms that gather	S.C. Foster arr. Sankey 1840-1908	F.J. Crosby 1820-1915	Khawikhuma 1890-1971	SS5b 971
1915 HT Section	63 Aw mi sang tam	SZ	6/11, 11/12	O For a thousand tongues	T. Jarman 1776-1861 'Lyngham' (1803)	C. Wesley 1707-1788 (1739)	Sainghinga 1899-1990	Alexander's Hymns III 291
1915 HT Section	64 Lalpa Chu Fakin	SZ, LT	10/12	I will praise the lord with heart and voice	Ira D. Sankey 1840-1908	Lynan G Cuyler (Crosby) 1894	Rev Rohmingiana 1888-1960	SS5b 899
1915 HT Section	86 Hlim Takin	SZ	26, 28/12	Glorious things of thee are spoken	J.R. Sweney 1837-1899 SSS 1117	Haydn (1797) / Towner	Rev. Taisena 1891-1959	SS5b 1117
1915 HT Section	363 Nangma Thil	SZ, LT	30/10, 17/12, 11/03	Sing the wondrous love of Jesus	Mrs J.G. Wilson 1865-1945	John Newton 1725-1807 (1779)	Rev. Langkhaia 1884-1979	Alexander's Hymns III 327
1915 HT Section	495 Isua Hmangahna	SZ	11/3			E.E. Hewitt 1851-1920	Rev. R. Dala 1884-1922	Alexander's Revival Hymns
1922	26 Kan Pathian kan pulpa	SZ	6/11	O God, Our Help in ages past	Dr. William Croft 1678-1727 'St Ann' (1714)	Isaac Watts 1674-1748 (1708)	Rev E Rowlands 1867-1939	SS5b 513
1922	61 Ni tin isua ka	SZ, LT	11/3	Still sweeter every day	C. Austin Miles 1868-1946	Rev W.C. Martin (1899)	Rev. Hauchhunga 1880-1972	RS 458
1922	178 Ka Tiantu Khawiah	SZ, LT	11/3		Rev. R. Lowry 1826-1899 (Where is my wandering boy)		Kalliana 1883-1910	SS5b 776
1922	179 Thisen Hlu	SZ, LT	30/10, 11/03	Edwards "Rhosymedre" (1836) / "Dewisant" (1874)			Rev. Langkhaia 1884-1979 (1914)	WTB 240
1922	306 Chhandamtu thisen hlu	SZ	19/2	From KTB 235			Rev. Langkhaia 1884-1979	Khasi Tune Book 235
1922	325 Lalber chuan ruai	SZ, LT	5/2	Gather them in!	Geo. C. Stebbins 1846-1945	F.J. Van Alstyne 1820-1915 (1885)	Darkhama	SS5b 779
1930 HT	45 A Hmangahnaa	SZ, LT	28/12		J.H. Burke 19th C	LW	Romuald 1894-1937	SS5b 568
1930 HT	57 Krista Thisen Hlu	SZ, LT	13/11, 18/12, 11/03	Precious thought my father knoweth	Geo. C. Stebbins 1846-1945	McLeod Wylie (1881)	Rev. P.D. Sena 1901-1974	SS5b 138
1930 HT	71 Aw Ropui Ber	SZ	22/10	The blood has always precious been	R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965		R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965	
?	89 Mai Min Sawm Turin	LZ	6/11, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26/12	"Hallelujah Amen!"	Patea 1894-1950		Patea 1894-1950	
1930 HT	90 Leiah a lo piang	SZ, LT	22, 23, 25, 26/12	"Peace on Earth"	Zasiama 1900-1952	Harm. Rokunga 1914-1969	Harm. Rokunga 1914-1969	
1930 HT	95 Hlimna ni Ropui	LZ	18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26/12	"Glory to God in the Highest"	R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965		R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965	
1930 HT	104 Ram Thianghina	LZ	22/12, 24/12, 25/12	"The Newborn King"	Patea 1894-1950		Patea 1894-1950	
1930 HT	115 Khawwelah hian lai tam	LZ	23/12, 24/12, 25/12	"Virgin Birth"	R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965		R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965	
1930 HT	136 Aw Hmangahna sawi	SZ, LT	11/03, 10/12	I stand amazed	Charles H. Gabriel 1856-1932	Charles H. Gabriel 1856-1932 (1905)	Zawngauva 1899-1987	Alexander's Hymns III 4
1930 HT	213 En Ru Pathian	SZ	27/11	"The Cleansing Blood"	Thatherma		Thatherma	
1930 HT	250 Ni Ropui a lo thleng	LZ	10/03	"The Day of Glory is Come"	Patea 1894-1950		Patea 1894-1950	
1930 HT	574 Dam Chungin kan tiantu	SZ	18/12	"Brotherly Love"	R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965		R.L. Kamlaia 1902-1965	
1930 HT	553 Aw Lalpa i Malsawma	SZ, LT	11/12, 28/12	"Lord we praise thee for thy blessing"	John Hughes' Cwm Rhonda' (1907)		Ch. Pasena 1893-1961	At Worship 238
1955?	79 Khawvel lawm nan	SZ	25/12	Joy to the World	Arr. Dr. L. Mason 1792-1872 'Antioch' (1839)	Isaac Watts 1674-1748 (1719)	Rev. Khawngihnga 1889-1948	SS5b 111
1955?	98 A lo thang chhandamtu	SZ	26/12	For Christ and the Church	J McGranahan (Thy Saviour Calls)		Selhranga 1888-1978	SS5b 362
1955?	360 Krista Kohrian Tan	SZ	22/10, 13/11, 10/12		Geo. C. Stebbins 1846-1945 (1898)	JR Clements 1868-1946 (1897)	Rev. Sialithanga 1897-1980	SS5b 1119
?	36 Aw Khawngahntu Pathianin	SZ	06/11		Chawngkupa 1909-1990		Chawngkupa 1909-1990	
?	94 Lal Pian Hun Pangpar	LZ	25/12		Patea 1894-1950		Patea 1894-1950	
?	96 Eden Par Mawi	LZ	22, 23, 24, 25/12		Rev. Taisena 1891-1959		Rev. Taisena 1891-1959	
?	99 Lal Pian Hun	SZ, LT	23/12, 24/12, 25/12		Raligama 1907-1981	1919 Harm. Rev Z.T. Sangkhuma 1934-		
?	100 Van Hmun Ropui	LZ	18, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28/12		Denghila 1906-1969		Denghila 1906-1969	
?	105 Bethlehem Mual	LZ	18/12		Rokunga 1914-1969		Rokunga 1914-1969	
?	108 Kum Sul Vei	SZ	24/12		Laizuthanga 1916-1950		Laizuthanga 1916-1950	
?	114 A M'lan Riang	SZ, LT	22/12, 23/12, 24/12, 25/12		Rokunga 1914-1969		Rokunga 1914-1969	
?	116 Hosana Ti Zein Aw	LZ	18/12, 22/12, 26/12		Suaklana 1901-1979		Suaklana 1901-1979	
?	199 Aw kalvari thng	LZ	11/03		Rev. Chhawna 1888-1977		Rev. Chhawna 1888-1977	
?	366 Ka Thihlung Suai	SZ, LT	10/03		From KTB 224 (Incorrectly states 'Hyder')		Neihlana 1901-1996	Khasi Tune Book 224
?	400 Hneh theih loh	SZ	27/11	Blessed Assurance	Lalnual 1924-2001		Rokunga 1914-1969	
?	415 Hriat chamma hlu ber	SZ	04/12		Mrs.J.F. Knapp 1839-1908	F.J. Crosby 1820-1915 (1873)	Rev. Dr. R.K. Ngiklana 1929-1985	SS5b 873
?	506 A Mak Mang E	SZ	13/11		Dr. Ramdinthara Sallo		Dr. Ramdinthara Sallo	
?	527 Van Ropuina Kalsanin	SZ	27/11		Rev. H. Lenguta 1945-		Rev H Lenguta 1945-	
?	528 Kan Lalpa Tan	SZ	29/01		T. Dokima 1945-		T. Dokima 1945-	
?	530 Lalpa Kai Tura	SZ	06/11		Thanchhuma 1938-1994		Harm. Lafromawia 1959-	
?	529 Lal Imanuela	SZ	11/12		F. Vanlachhuanga 1950-		F. Vanlachhuanga 1950-	
After 1969	121 Kum Sul Liam	SZ	27/11		C. Laikhawilana 1937-		C. Laikhawilana 1937-	
PHB 2008	314 Aw Lalpa, a va mak mang e	SZ	30/10, 13/11		H. Biakkhuma 1955-2006		Harm. H. Lalidimawia (son)	

## Appendix C: DVD Guide

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### 1. *Zaikhawm: 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2012, Serkawn Baptist Church*

I attended the *zaikhawm* at Serkawn on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> December as well as at other churches. All the recordings on this DVD are from the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Although there were fewer dancers and the atmosphere was slightly more subdued than at other *zaikhawm* evenings, these recordings best demonstrate the drumming and dancing which are otherwise obscured when the *lamtual* is more crowded. We met in a downstairs hall of the old church, tucked behind the newer modern church building. The purple sign, 'Chhandamtu a piang ta' declares 'The Saviour is born'. Serkawn is considered to be the heart of the Baptist Church in Mizoram; this was where the Baptist missionaries first established their mission compound and the current church stands on the site of their first bamboo church. English titles, where given, are drawn from those found in earlier hymnal editions.

#### **00:00 *Mal Min Sawm Turin***

This was one of the most popular songs at Christmas, and was actually sung twice in this evening. In this instance, the drummer begins in a high key but is immediately asked to change it. The whole song is sung twice and the last two verses are also repeated a third time at the end. It was composed by the prolific writer Patea (1894-1950) and was certainly entering popular usage around 1927 as it is handwritten in the back of two hymnals from this time.

#### **08:09 *Hlimna Ni Ropui Chu A Eng (Glory to God in the Highest)***

This is one of the few *lengkhawm zai* songs that was published at an early stage, in the 'New Song Book' of 1930, although it was probably sung to what is now printed as 'Thluk 2' in the current KHB. Nevertheless Kamlala's *lengkhawm thluk* is the one that has survived and is popular at the Christmas *zaikhawm*. The whole song is sung twice and is repeated a final time from the second verse.

#### **15:46 *Eden Par Mawi***

Composed by Taisena (1891-1959) 'Eden Par Mawi' is another particularly popular example of *lengkhawm zai*, and it has even crossed-over into gospel music having been covered by several choirs and gospel singers. It is sung twice through and repeated again from the second verse. The tea-break is announced at the end.

#### **25:08 *Van Hmun Ropui Pelin***

This comes from slightly later in the same evening after the 'short sharings', prayers and tea-break. Little is known about this song or its composer Denghlira (1906-1969), yet this continues to be one of the most popular songs. This recording demonstrates the tempo acceleration particularly clearly. It is sung twice and repeated again from the second verse.

## **2. *Lengkhawm Zai in Church: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2011, Ramhlun South Baptist Church***

This recording was taken at the inauguration of a new church building, so the *lengkhawm* is particularly animated but is not as exceptional as other special services, so the scenes shown in this recording are quite representative of what might take place during or before a Sunday service. The women are wearing the traditional puan design, *puanchei*, which is reserved for special occasions.

### **00:00 *Aw Lalpa, chungnung ber, kan fak hle a che***

This recording was taken to showcase the drumming in particular. The smaller *khuangte* is playing and dominating the sound, in a manner appropriate to the *lengkhawm* style, while the larger *khuangpui* maintains the steady beat, sometimes joining the sub-beats. This heightens the atmosphere and directs the tempo change. This song is very significant, having been written by Thanga on the occasion of the abolition of the traditional *bawi* system which was decreed to be a form of slavery by the British government in 1910. This was a controversial issue, but this song of celebration has continued to be used to celebrate liberation and freedom in a variety of situations. The tune originally came from Free Church Hymns III and is printed in the same four parts, but is sung to the *lengkhawm thluk* in this recording.

### **04:32 *Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U (All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name)***

Having started by filming the drums, I changed my focus to the dancing as I felt my position and the representative style and mood of the dancing was an opportunity not to be missed. The consequent video disruption is regrettable. Here we see the circle fill with a mixture of ages, both male and female, including some mothers with children strapped to their backs in the traditional style. Some women find space to be particularly expressive in the middle of the circle, with one lying on her back on the floor at 07:36. This is the *lengkhawm* version which modifies the Miles Lane (by Shrubsole) setting of the familiar western hymn, 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name' by Perronet (1726-1792). It was one of the first hymns to be translated by the missionary Rowlands (1867-1939) and appears in the 1903 Presbyterian edition of the Kristian Hla Bu.

## **3. *Sol-fa zai: 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2011, Gilead Baptist Church***

Gilead (pronounced 'Gileed') was my local Baptist church nearest to AICS. Many of the members had connections with the college and I attended whenever I was not invited to a different church. I only took audio recordings at this church, and one example of their *sol-fa zai* is included here. This is not *lengkhawm zai*, but serves to provide a point of comparison. It fulfils the *sol-fa* style, with just one drum, a steady tempo and part-singing in places. There was no dancing.

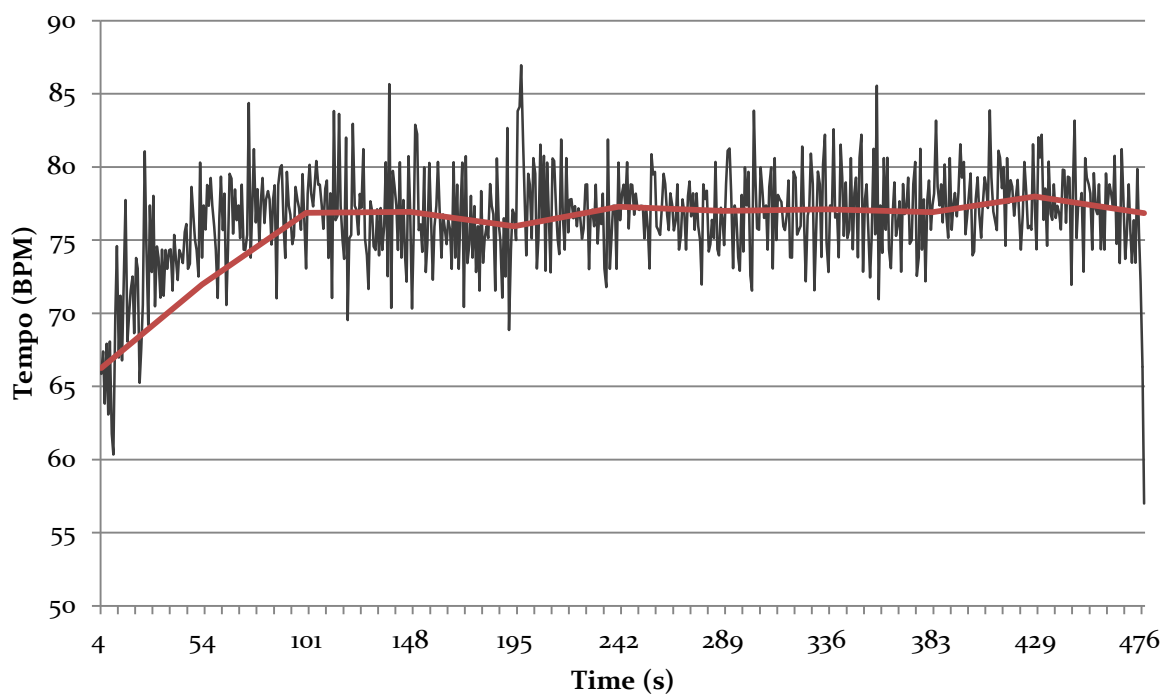
### ***Krista, Kohhran Tan Kan Ding (For Christ and the Church We Stand)***

This is a popular translation of an American hymn composed in 1897 by J.R. Clements. It was translated by Saiaithanga (1897-1980) much later in time, appearing in Mizo hymnals from about the 1950's. The original antiphonal arrangement of the male parts by George Stebbins is nearly always retained to some extent. They can be heard clearly in this recording. The whole song is sung twice. The keyboardist Gospelmawia can be heard creatively decorating the tune using the harpsichord setting.

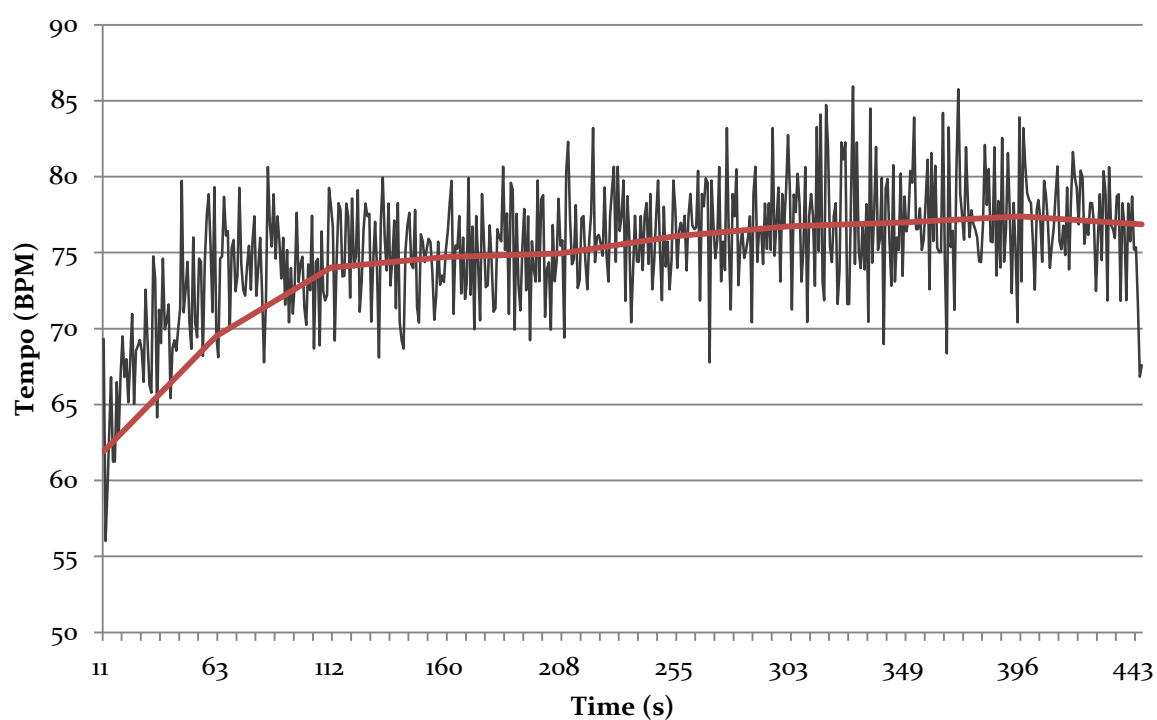
## Appendix D: Tempo Graphs

All from DVD examples. Black data series gives each beat of the *khuangpui*. Red line gives the average tempo from this data for each verse.

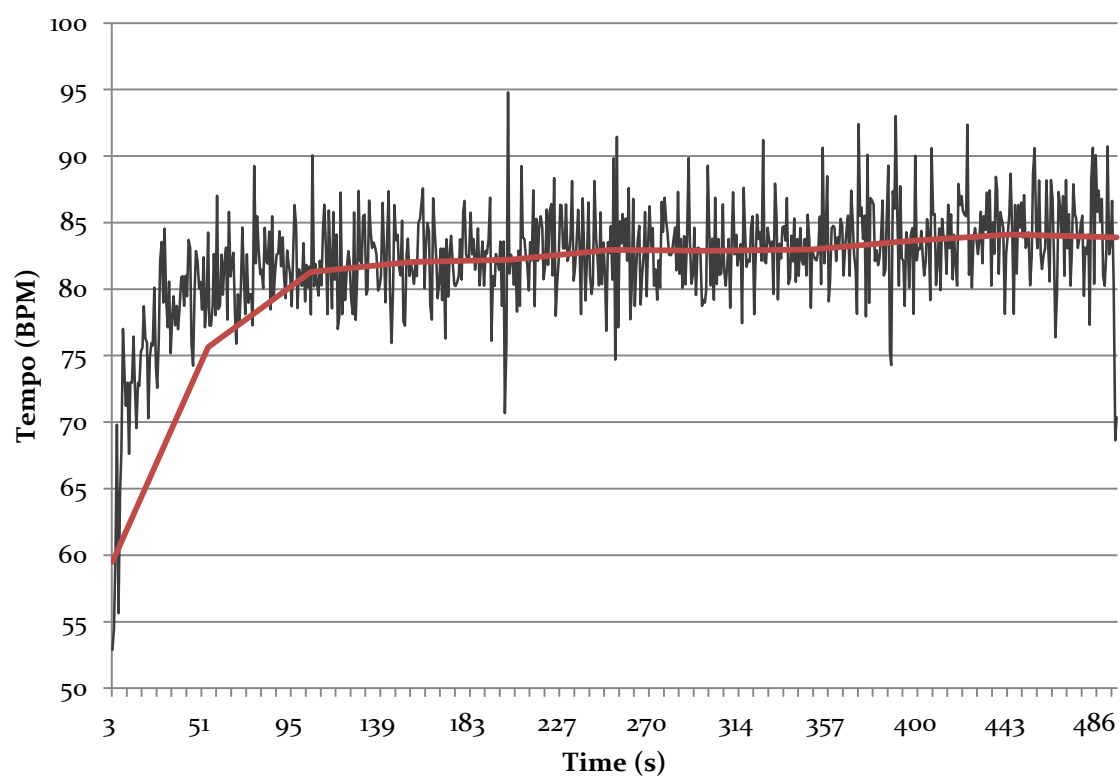
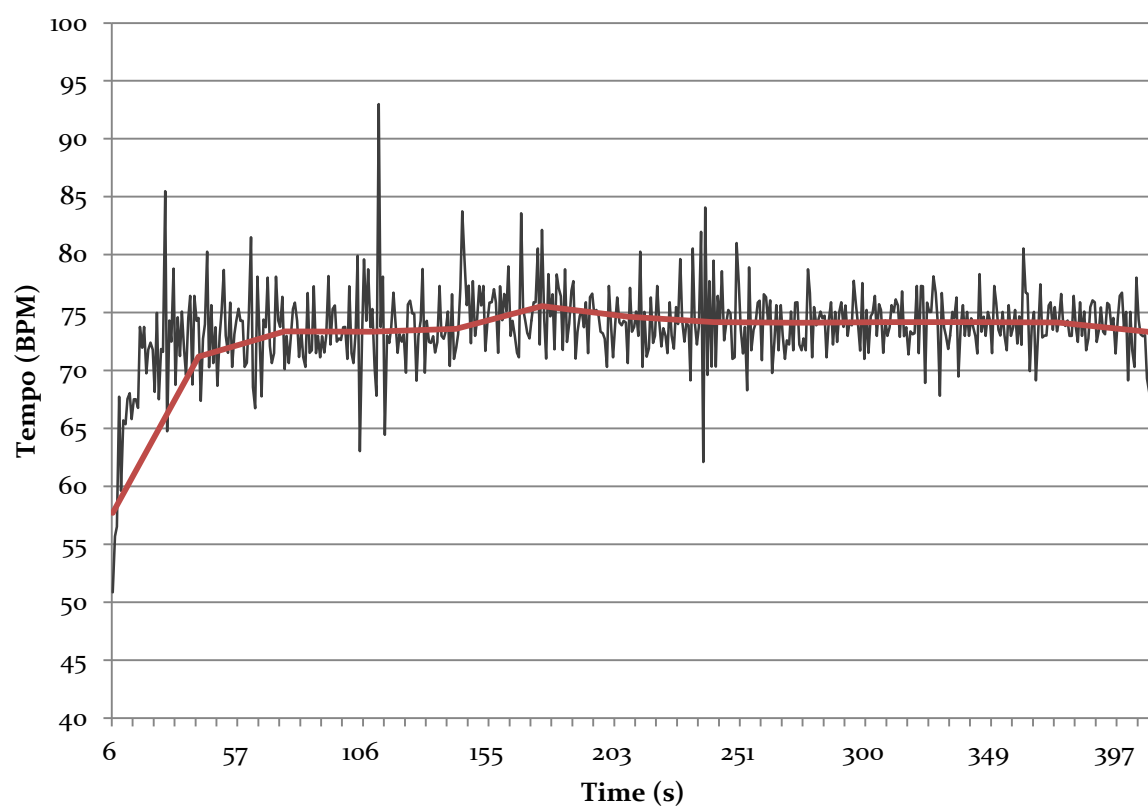
### *Mal Min Sawm Turin*



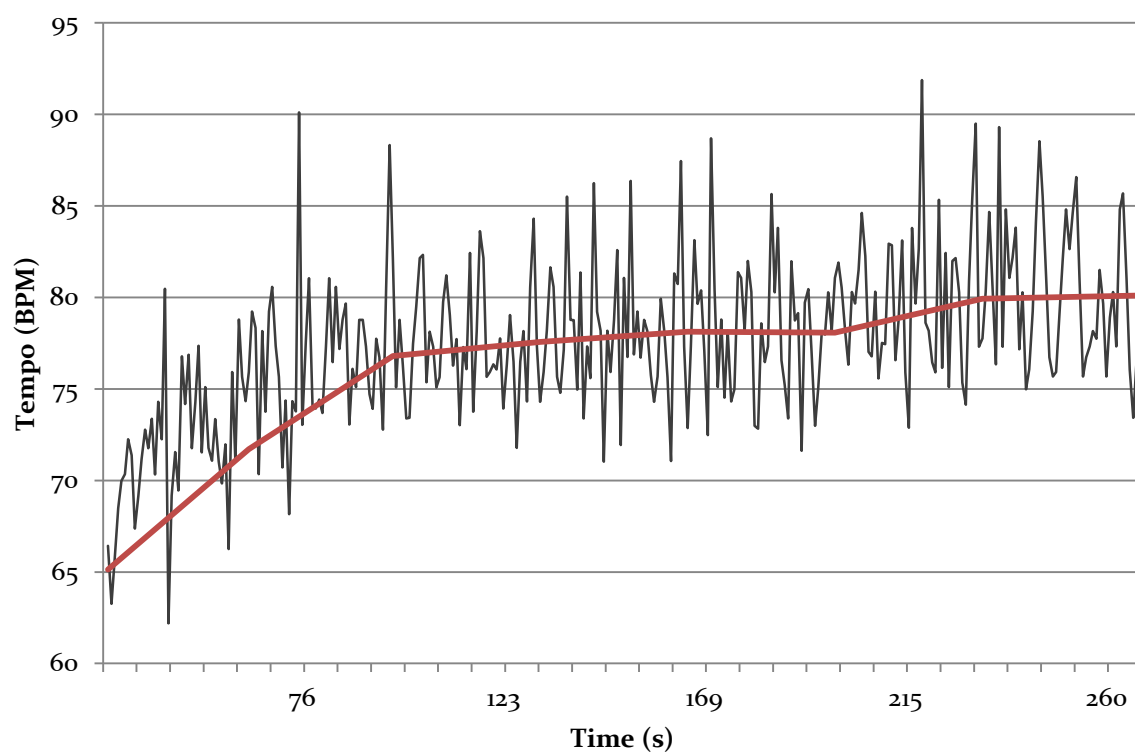
### *Hlimna Ni Ropui*



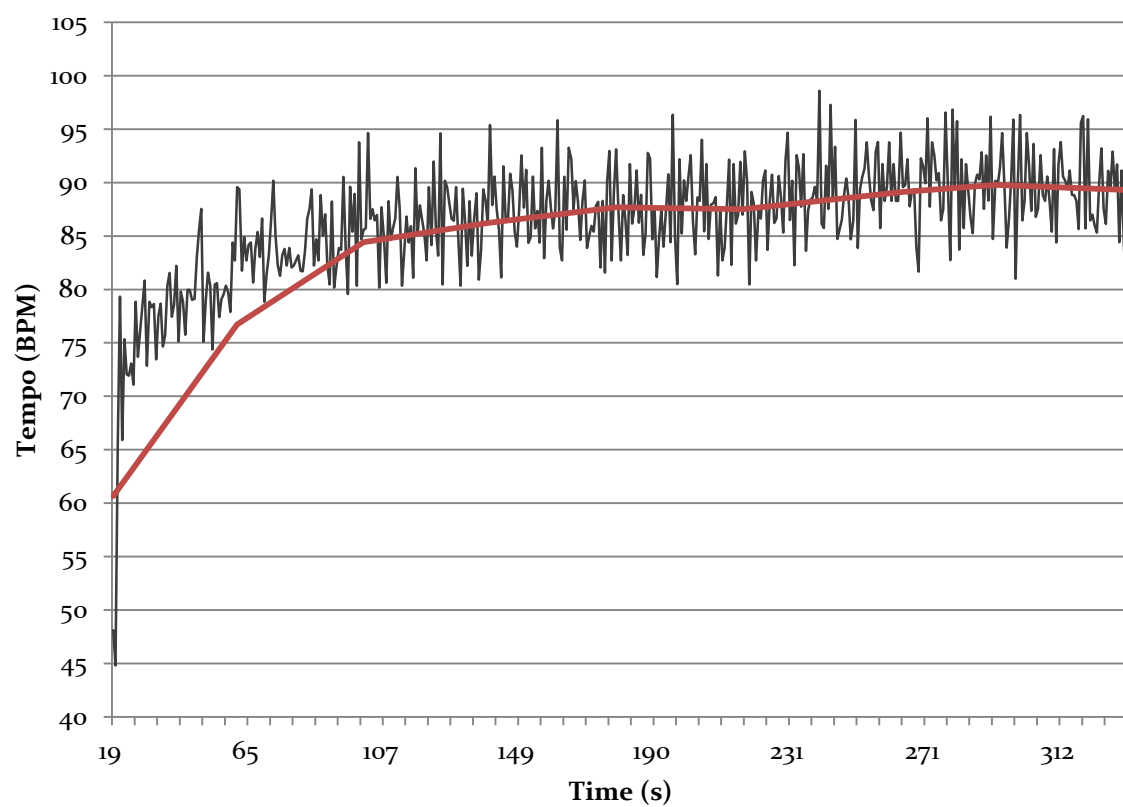


*Eden Par Mawi**Van Hmun Ropui Pelin*

*Aw Lalpa, Chungnung ber kan fak hle a che*



*Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U*



## Appendix E: Transcriptions

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The following pages contain staff notation transcriptions of the songs that feature on the DVD and in Chapter 3. Transcriptions of each recording for each song are given, and the bottom staff of each is a transcription of the sol-fa notation found in *Kristian Hla Bu* (2005). ‘Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U’ is unusual in that two western tunes are printed, both of which could be identified as forming a basis for the sung tune. The first tune is more likely, but both are given.

1. Mal Min Sawm Turin
2. Hlimna Ni Ropui
3. Eden Par Mawi
4. Van Hmun Ropui Pelin
5. Aw Lalpa, Chungnung Ber
6. Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U
7. Ram Thianghlina
8. Khawvelah Hian

# Mal Min Sawm Turin

24/12 Farm Veng  
(Transposed from Db)

25/12 Serkaw  
(Transposed from Bb)

24/12 Farm Veng  
(Zaikhawm, in C)

22/12 Serkaw  
(In C)

23/12 Serkaw  
(In C)

23/12 Serkaw  
(Transposed from Bb)

26/12 Zotlang  
(In C)

Solfa

Mal min sawm tur - in, Van khua - an ro a re; E - den kawng -khar an

2 6

ta, Lut r'u Zi - on\_ khua a var ta.. Lawm r'u, lawm r'u min tlan-tu be- ram - no - a lo

3

a lo kal. Fak r'u, Ha-le-lu-i-a! A-men, Ha-le-lu-i-a! Min tlan tur - in a lo kal. kal.

# Hlimna Ni Ropui Chu A Eng

25/12 Serkawn  
(Transposed from E)

Hlim-na ni ro - pui chu a eng, Zai-tiang hi\_khaw-l-raw - nah a liam; Lei Be - thle-hem dai reh a nghak, A hming chu Lal\_

22/12 Serkawn  
(Transposed from F#)

18/12 Ramhlun South  
(Transposed from E)

23/12 Serkawn  
(Transposed from E)

24/12 Farn Veng  
(Transposed from F)

24/12 Farn Veng (2)  
(Transposed from F#)

26/12 Zolrang  
(Transposed from E)

Solia  
(Transposed from E)

2 7

I - man - u - el. A chung-nung ber a chung-nung, chung-ning ber Lal ro - pui; hian kum-khuai-in, Rem leng se Ha - le - lui - al



## Eden par mawi chul hnu tivul leh turin

25/12 Serkawn  
(Transposed from E)

E-den par mawi chul hnu ti-vul leh tur-in. Khaw-vel Chhan-dam-tu a \_\_\_\_ lo piang ta; \_\_\_\_ Pial-ral nun mawi min rawn sin-tir leh theih nan, Lal Chung-nung ber-in hnun lawm ber a rawn

23/12 Serkawn  
(Transposed from E)

24/12 Fann Veng  
(Transposed from F)

Solfá  
(In C)

8

thlang. \_\_\_\_ I lawm ang\_ u, Rem-na Lal lo piang hi, A fak - na lei leh van\_ thang chhuak se; \_\_\_\_ Hei ang reng - a kan\_ ta - na Lal lawm-awm hi, An piang lo, an piang leh tawh tōng chat-uan - in. \_\_\_\_

# Van Hmun Ropui Pelin

24/12 Farm Veng  
(Transposed from F)

Van hmun ro - pui pel - in, A lo kal sual - na kar - ah Khaw-vel hre-hawm a tuar a ni Aw ka

25/12 Serkawm  
(Transposed from E)

25/12 Zotlang  
(Transposed from E)

18/12 Ramhlun South  
(Transposed from E)

23/12 Serkawm  
(Transposed from Eb)

26/12 Zotlang  
(Transposed from E)

Solia

2

Lal, I va riang em\_ ve aw! A pian - na tlawm mah se, Ka chhan-dam - tu a ni\_ Chavi-mawi nan hla i sa ang.

# Aw Lalpa, Chungnung Ber, Kan Fak Hle a che

17/12 Ramhlun South  
(Transposed from F)

Solfa  
(Transposed from Bb)

Aw Lal - pa, Chung-nung ber, kan fak hle a che! Pa -

6

thian Nung leh Eng - kim-ti - thei i ni e; Hnehchhiah - te, bawih, riang - vai - te,

12

mi sual-te thian, Fah-rah- te, re- thei - te, Fah-rah- te re -

17

thei - te Fah - rah - te re - thei - te, Lal - pa leh Pa - thian.

# Lal Isua Hming I Fak Ang U

17/12 Ramhlun South  
(Transposed from F)

KHB 52 Thluk 2  
(Transposed from Bb)

KHB 52 Thluk 3  
(Transposed from F)

Lal I-sua hming i fak ang u, An - gel chawi-mawi - a chu\_\_\_ Lal -

5

ber lu-khum la\_\_\_chhuak u - la Lal - ber khum-tir rawh u,\_\_\_ Lal - ber\_\_\_khum-tir rawh

10

u, Lal - ber lu-khum la chhuak u - la Lal - ber khum-tir rawh u\_\_\_

# Ram Thianghlma Lal Lo Piang Chu

24/12 Farm Veng  
Transposed from Db

Ram thiang-hlim-a Lal lo piang chu,\_\_\_ Chung lam ar-si\_\_\_ chuan\_ a pan zel a;\_\_\_ Mi fing a-mah

25/12 Serkawn  
Transcribed from Db

Solfa  
In C

7

zawng - tu-te pawhkhan, Ar-si chu an ten a;\_\_\_ Kei pawh chu ar - si eng chu pan zel - in, Lal pian-na hmun

157

2 14

tlawm Be-thle-hem min\_ thlen ang. —

Aw, Be-thle-hem tlang\_ ka thlen hma chuan, chawl lo-vin ka\_ kal ang: —

ka\_ kal ang: —

19

Chhun ar - si eng chuan min hruai zel ang a, Mar - i chawi lai nau - sen chu ka hmu\_ ang a. —

Mar - i chawi lai nau - sen chu ka hmu\_ ang a. —

Mar - i chawi lai nau - sen chu ka hmu\_ ang a. —

# Khawvelah Hian Lal Tam Tak An Lo Piang Ta a

25/12 Serkawn  
Transposed from Eb

22/12 Serkawn  
Transposed from Eb

24/12 Farn Veng  
Transposed from Eb

Solfa  
Ini C

Khaw-ve - lah hian lal tam tak an lo piang ta a, Mah-se, Lal Kris-ta ang hi an la piang ngai lo;  
Van Lal Fa a lo piang, Lal Kraun

7

min\_ khum-tir, Van mi zawng zawng paw - hin min lawm pui ve rawh u, I him ang, I lawm ang, van lal Fa i fak ang, A pian



2 <sup>14</sup>

na law-min lei-lung hi zai - in khat se: — Van Lal Fa a lo piang, Lal Kraun min khum tir tur, — Van mizawng zawng paw hin min lawm - pui\_ ve rawh u. —

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